

**West Virginia Executive Branch  
Privacy Tip of the Week**

*Periodically, the Privacy Office may issue tips for the purpose of assisting you in making informed decisions in your “away from work” life. The following tip is for that purpose.*

**Mystery Shopper.....**

Dear Privacy Office,

I love shopping, all kinds of shopping. I like to buy shoes and clothes and purses and.....well, I just love shopping! I was super excited when I got an e-mail offering me the opportunity to be a “mystery shopper”! Then, I got a little worried when I was asked to submit a fee with my application. What do you know about this – does it sound legit?

Sincerely,

Shopper Girl

Dear Shopper Girl,

Sounds like you really like to shop! Unfortunately, I’m afraid your “mystery shopper” e-mail is just as you suspected – not legit; it’s probably a scam. Although there are lots of opportunities for mystery shoppers, this one sounds pretty sketchy.

First of all, a legitimate company isn’t going to ask you to submit a “fee” with your application.

One of the more common mystery shopper scams involves being asked to rate the customer service of a money transfer company (i.e. Western Union or Money Gram). You might be asked to deposit a check into your bank account, withdraw cash and then wire it to another country, using the money transfer company. You then “rate” the company and send a report back to your new “mystery shopper” employer. Your payment is keeping a small portion of the money that you deposited into and withdrew from your account.

Here’s the deal – the check will likely be bogus and you’ll owe your bank the money you withdrew as well as a fee for the bounced check!

If you want to be a mystery shopper, here are a few Dos and Don'ts to follow:

Don't

- Pay upfront fees to get a job as a mystery shopper.
- Deposit a check from someone you don't know and then wire money back. The check is going to bounce, and you'll be stuck owing your bank.

Do

- Search the internet for legitimate companies who are looking for mystery shoppers (they're out there).
- Report online scams.
- If you believe you've responded to an online scam, file a complaint with:

The Federal Trade Commission:

<https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/>

The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center:

<http://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx>

Your state Attorney General: <http://www.wvago.gov/>

Sincerely,

Privacy Office