

August 6, 2003

**OFFICIALS URGE NEW YORK'S ELDERLY TO BE
VIGILANT AGAINST CONSUMER SCAMS AS PART OF
"NEW YORK CITY FRAUD AGAINST SENIOR CITIZENS WEEK"**

The New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA), the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), and the Federal Trade Commission's Northeast Regional Office (FTC) today teamed up to recognize "New York City Fraud Against Senior Citizens Week" at the Stanley Isaacs Senior Center in Manhattan. The agencies offered tips on how to combat consumer fraud targeting New York's 1.3 million older residents, including how to protect against home improvement scams, identity theft, and telemarketers.

"Seniors and their families need to be aware that fraud is a concern both in New York City and throughout the country," said Commissioner Edwin Mendez-Santiago of the New York City Department for the Aging. "We all need to be vigilant in our efforts to fight fraud by protecting our personal information, dealing with licensed, reputable companies and being empowered to say no or to get help before entering into any agreement."

"Unfortunately, scam artists too often prey on seniors," said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. "We estimate that 10 % of the complaints we receive are from senior citizens. Last year alone, DCA received nearly 700 home improvement contractor complaints, and with more than 240,000 senior homeowners in New York City, many disreputable contractors see seniors as an especially easy target. DCA continues its enforcement, but seniors can help by reporting their bad experiences with a dishonest merchant or an unlicensed contractor, as well as talking to and educating one another about potential problems."

"As a group, senior citizens are all too often victimized by Identity Theft crimes and telemarketing schemes," said Barbara Anthony, Director of the Northeast Region of the Federal Trade Commission. "The best thing seniors can do to protect themselves is to register with the FTC's Do-Not-Call Registry -- that way, seniors will know that any telemarketers who do call may not be legitimate."

DFTA, DCA, and the FTC have outreach programs available to the community. DFTA's Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center helps elderly victims of crime, and offers prevention counseling, as well as assistance on elder abuse. DCA's Speakers Bureau provides a representative to senior centers or community organizations to talk about issues relating to consumer fraud and how seniors can protect themselves. In addition to speaking at area senior centers, the FTC has held consumer university events in Harlem and lower Manhattan to educate seniors on a wide range of consumer issues.

To file a complaint or for more information call 311 or visit DFTA online at www.nyc.gov/aging, DCA at www.nyc.gov/consumers, and visit the FTC at www.ftc.gov.