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OFT ANNOUNCES SCAMS AWARENESS MONTH **Cross-border mass-marketed scams targeted**

The OFT will launch a month-long campaign to alert the public to deceptive and fraudulent mass-marketed scams on 1 February.

The campaign is co-ordinated throughout the member countries of ICPEN, the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network. The ICPEN president this year is Christine Wade, the OFT's director of consumer regulation enforcement.

The campaign aims to arm consumers with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognise, report and stamp out scams, many of which originate from overseas. It will support the development of further cross-border co-operation between ICPEN member organizations such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and between members and other law-enforcement agencies such as the FBI, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the United States Postal Inspection Service. In addition to alerting the public about scams they may receive through e-mail, the post or by telephone, it will culminate in a worldwide internet sweep, co-ordinated across ICPEN member countries, specifically to identify current scams which use unsolicited e-mails (spam) to target victims.

The OFT's awareness campaign will include:

- information on the most common types of scam

- a leaflet highlighting what people should look out for and how to protect themselves against falling victim to deceptive approaches, to be distributed through trading standards departments, neighbourhood watch schemes, and other voluntary and statutory agencies
- a radio advertising campaign
- a video news release and web-chat.

Christine Wade, director of consumer regulation enforcement at the OFT, said:

‘As the global market place shrinks and communications systems become more sophisticated, the threat from rogue traders and scams that exploit consumers increases. Scammers are organised, manipulative and resourceful. Scams damage individuals and harm the interests of legitimate business. That is why the OFT has identified combating scams as a priority area for the next three years.

‘Our presidency of ICPEN presents us with an opportunity to work more closely not only with ICPEN members, but also with law enforcement agencies in other countries so we deliver seamless global enforcement and tackle scams which originate outside our borders. That work must extend to arming consumers with the skills to recognise and combat scams when they are targeted.’

Lydia Parnes, acting director of the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Education, said:

‘The FTC is very pleased to join ICPEN and the OFT in this global campaign to educate consumers about the tell-tale signs of fraud and scams. By

publicising the tools to recognise fraud and report it, we can help stop it and, in turn, increase consumer confidence in cross border trade.'

Tim Killam, Assistant Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, said:

'The RCMP works closely with many partners nationally and internationally to combat organised crime in all its facets, including consumer fraud. If we are to be successful in ensuring safe homes and safe communities, our approach must be fully integrated and borderless.'

NOTES

1. ICPEN is a membership organisation comprising the trade practices law enforcement authorities of more than 30 countries. The mandate of the network is to share information about cross-border commercial activities that may affect consumer interests, and to encourage international cooperation among law enforcement agencies. The network operates under a rotating presidency.
2. The campaign will roll out over the month of February and feature weekly announcements highlighting different types of scams and advice on how consumers can recognise and protect themselves against being conned.

MEDIA enquiries: 020 7211+

Rachel Clark **8899**
Roger Hislop **8133**
Mark Kram **8900**
press@oft.gov.uk

Julia Smith **8898**
Kate Wilcox **8901**
Mike Ricketts **8904**

Out of hours: mobile: 07774 134814
Copies of press notices: Ext. 8993
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