Credit Card Fraud: Do you have poor credit? Are you having trouble obtaining a VISA or MasterCard or other major credit card because of a poor credit rating or other reason? Beware of con artists and their phony credit card offers. Some seemingly legitimate programs to extend you credit will end up costing you lots of money, and you won’t get the credit cards you think are being offered.

The scam can start with a phone call, a postcard, or a letter, which claims that for a fee you can obtain a VISA or MasterCard or other major credit card, or establish that you are credit worthy enough to obtain one of these cards. Typically, the promoters of these phony offers indicate that your card is pre-approved and that it can be obtained without any credit check. The fee charged typically ranges from $35 to $50.

When your card arrives in the mail, you find out it can only be used to pay for orders from a specific store or catalog. The store or catalog, which is owned by the company that issued the credit card, may not even offer merchandise of interest to you.

This kind of "single-use credit card" is not a new concept, but recently unwary victims of this scam are being sold these credit cards by con artists who misrepresent them as being all-purpose bank credit cards. At times, the deception is magnified by the fact that the merchandise in the catalog from which you must choose your purchases is either inferior or grossly overpriced.

You can protect yourself against the phony "one-shot" credit card offers by being very careful when you are considering opening a new credit card account. If you have poor credit, be skeptical if you are offered a pre-approved card with no credit check. Be sure you know the specific purpose of the card. If you are not satisfied with the information provided by those marketing the cards, do not pay the required fee. Otherwise, you may become a victim. You may also wish to check with your local Better Business Bureau, State Attorney General's office, or Postal Inspection Service office to determine if the company offering you a credit card is under investigation.

If you have been victimized in a deceptive credit card promotion through the U.S. Mail, report your experience to your local postmaster or nearest Postal Inspector.