Playing Foreign Lotteries By Mail: “Don't Do It!” You hear the state lotto jingle on the radio. The jackpot has been raised to $10 million. You've got lotto fever. Next thing you know there's a brochure in your mail urging you to participate in some foreign country's lotto--maybe one in Australia or Canada--via convenient mail-order purchase of lottery tickets, or of a share in a pool of lottery tickets. So you start thinking that getting into a new game might improve your luck, and you ask yourself, "Why not do it?" The U.S. Postal Inspection Service can give you the answer. Don't do it because:

• It's illegal. A federal statute prohibits mailing payments to purchase any ticket, share, or chance in a foreign lottery.

• It's impractical. Unlike playing in your state's lottery, you could not be certain that you would obtain the play you paid for.

Most foreign lottery solicitations sent to addressees in the U.S. do not come from foreign government agencies or licensees. Instead, they come from "bootleggers" who seek exorbitant fees from those wishing to play. The activities of bootleggers are neither being controlled nor monitored by the government of the country in which they are located. Typically, those who pay the required fees never see any lottery tickets issued by the government-operated lottery they are hoping to enter. They are left to rely on various forms of entry "confirmation" issued by the bootleggers.

As a general proposition, sending lottery material through the mail is prohibited by federal law. This material includes, among other things, letters or circulars concerning a lottery, tickets or any paper claiming to represent tickets, chances or shares in a lottery, and payments to purchase any such tickets, chances, or shares.

Congress has enacted limited exemptions from this prohibition, including some which allow such material for a lottery conducted by a state of the United States to be mailed to addresses in that state. No exemption has been enacted which would make it lawful for a foreign lottery enterprise to use the U.S. Mail, or cause it to be used, to operate, promote, or enter one of its lotteries.