

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD!

Before buying gold dust in Sierra Leone, please take a moment to read this warning!

The U.S. embassy in Freetown warns all Americans engaging in gold dust transactions in Sierra Leone to exercise extreme caution before handing over any money.

Recently, American citizens have been the targets of numerous gold dust scams. In most cases, losses total in the tens of thousands of dollars, though several victims have lost up to \$350,000. The Government of Sierra Leone officially condemns this fraud, and Sierra Leone law enforcement agencies will pursue and prosecute cases to the extent possible with their limited means. However, if you are the victim of a scam, you are very unlikely to recover any of your losses, even if the perpetrators are caught and imprisoned.

Each scam is a slightly different from the next one, but they generally incorporate the following elements:

1. The seller shows the American buyer a small sample of genuine gold, often having it tested before *bona fide* officers of the Government Gold & Diamond Office (GGDO) as proof of authenticity.
2. The seller promises to give a larger amount of gold to the American buyer to sell overseas if the buyer agrees to split the proceeds equitably. While the seller might not ask for money for the gold itself, he or she asks the American buyer to pay thousands of dollars up front to cover shipping, insurance, taxes, and export fees. The seller promises to ship the gold to the United States, or to meet the buyer in a third country to hand it over to him or her (with the American paying up front for plane tickets and per diem, as well).
3. The American buyer returns to the United States to await a shipment of gold that never arrives. Often, the seller then just disappears. Sometimes he or she will continue to ask for additional money until the American buyer wises up or the seller disappears.

To avoid this situation, the Embassy, upon the advice and recommendations of the GGDO, strongly suggests that you take the following precautions:

- Never purchase gold from someone you don't already know, e.g., people who approach you in the street, on the beach, in a hotel lobby or in a bar or restaurant, even if they show you a gold-dealer's license. Many scam artists possess valid licenses.
- If you pay for your gold in Sierra Leone, take it all with you when you leave Sierra Leone, or arrange in person to have it shipped directly to you. Do not count on the seller to ship it to you, and never pay for gold that you haven't seen!

- Pay any fees required by the Government to prepare your gold for export directly to the appropriate government office, not through the seller or other middleman. Avoid paying up front for insurance, shipping, or other business expenses; insist that the seller do so out of pocket. If you must pay up front, deal only with reputable companies chosen by yourself, not those recommended by the seller or middleman. Make all arrangements in person at these companies before you leave Sierra Leone.
- Insist that your gold be tested and sealed only at GGDO offices, never in your hotel room or other venue. Once sealed, do not allow anyone to open the seal. If the seal is broken before you depart Sierra Leone, either refuse the package or have it re-sealed in the presence of GGDO officers. Never try to export gold that is not sealed by the GGDO.
- Be suspicious of promises of quantities of gold exceeding a few ounces. The vast majority of gold in Sierra Leone is panned out of alluvial deposits. Arrange to have the entire quantity you are purchasing tested at the GGDO for authenticity.
- Consider applying for a gold-dealer's license yourself so that you can eliminate middlemen. Applications may be filed with the Ministry of Mineral Resources along with the requisite fees (approximately US\$3,000).

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF A GOLD DUST SCAM ...

File a report with the Sierra Leone Police. You may also contact the Embassy for advice on how to proceed. Your report will also help us in our interactions with the Sierra Leonean government to protect other Americans from these scams. However, please keep in mind that the Embassy cannot arrest or initiate lawsuits against perpetrators in Sierra Leone, nor can the Embassy recover your lost money.

If you are arrested, subject to search and seizure, or held against your will as a result of your association with a scam artist, insist on being taken to or contacting the U.S. Embassy in Freetown immediately.

If you are returning to Freetown to initiate a legal action or to testify in an on-going one, we strongly suggest that you register with the Embassy at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>. The Embassy cannot represent you in any action, but we can provide you with a vetted list of lawyers and ensure that your rights as a plaintiff or witness are not jeopardized because of your American citizenship.

Successful American gold buyers, the Government of Sierra Leone, and reputable local gold dealers all agree: There are no deals to be had in Sierra Leone's gold market. **If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!**