

State govs saying 'No thanks' to mystery laptops

August 28 2009, By LAWRENCE MESSINA , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Even during tight budgetary times, a growing handful of state governors are proving too wary to accept laptop computers that have shown up at their offices this month, unsolicited.

Officials in West Virginia, Vermont, Wyoming and Washington state have reported receiving between three and five laptops, each over the course of two separate deliveries - but none had ordered any of them.

"They immediately raised a red flag," said Matt Turner, spokesman for West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin. "No one said, 'Hey, we got a free gift.'"

The laptops were made by Hewlett-Packard or come from its Compaq brand. The world's leading PC maker intercepted a shipment to at least one other state, according to a bulletin issued by the National Governors Association in response to the suspicious deliveries.

"HP is aware that fraudulent state government orders recently have been placed for small amounts of HP equipment. HP took prompt corrective action to address the fraudulent orders and is working with law enforcement personnel on a criminal investigation," the Palo Alto, Calif.-based company said in a statement, declining further comment.

Hewlett-Packard has contracts to provide computer equipment to Vermont, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming.

The National Governors Association warning also said Vermont's laptops were paid for with a credit card issued in the name of Gov. Jim Douglas - but that was not one actually held by Douglas or issued by that state.

Officials in Washington and Wyoming said those computers had been purchased with credit cards whose account numbers did not match any held by those states.

Frank Dorman, a spokesman for the [Federal Trade Commission](#), which watches out for identify theft and other fraud schemes, said the agency had not heard of such a situation and questioned who it would benefit.

But state officials were also concerned about what could be lurking inside the laptops.

"I don't know what's on them, but I'm assuming we didn't received these as a gesture of goodwill," said Kyle Schafer, West Virginia's chief technology officers. "We take very strong measures to protect ourselves from the outside world."

As a result, none of the governor's offices report turning on any of the machines. They instead either shipped them back or handed them over to law enforcement.

"Once the first shipment came, we realized they were in error and began the process to send them back to the company," said Cara Eastwood, spokeswoman for Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal. "When we got the second shipment, we turned it over to investigators."

West Virginia has become particularly sensitive to potential scams.

Earlier this year, someone ran up \$475,000 on a state licensing board's phone bill after it mistakenly posted its conference call account codes

online. The state's auditor was also tricked into rerouting nearly \$2 million meant for vendors into bank accounts set up by what investigators say is a Kenyan-based fraud ring.

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