

22 October 2004

Richard D. Fairbank  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Capital One Financial Corporation  
1680 Capital One Drive  
McLean, VA 22102

Dear Mr. Fairbank:

Your current television commercial advertising the private island giveaway is a major topic of discussion in the national search and rescue community right now. The advertisement, which depicts a man and his wife using a false SOS signal to capture the attention and take a photograph of the spoofed rescuers is distressing to those of us in the business of saving lives.

I feel confident that Capital One did not intend to offend the search and rescue community. However, please consider that in this post-9/11 era, America loves and respects her rescuers and most likely does not look favorably upon those that appear to disrespect them, especially by promoting illegal distress alerts.

These false alarms are not harmless pranks, as depicted in your advertisement. Each time a distress signal occurs rescuers risk potential personal injuries or death and incur significant financial ramifications. Further, more than 90% of the nation's rescuers are volunteers. This means that they are giving their own time and often, their own financial resources, to respond to a victim's call. Imagine how it would feel to arrive on scene only to discover that the so-called "victim" was playing a practical joke.

It would be relatively easy to dismiss the ad as having no impact, believing that the general public is not stupid enough to re-enact it. Yet, such circumstances do actually occur. Many jurisdictions have laws requiring fines and worse punishments for this criminal behavior. And rescuers, sadly, can be injured or killed in these false alert situations.

On behalf of the national search and rescue community, I urge you to find a way to turn this negative advertisement into a positive endorsement of America's rescuers. I invite you to contact me to discuss a mutual win/win strategy for correcting this oversight and repairing the damage Capital One has done to their image within the SAR community.

Sincerely,

Jacki Golike  
Executive Director

cc: NASAR Board of Directors; NASAR National Campaign Advisory Council;  
Dan Lemon, Secretary National Search and Rescue Committee