

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protections: Don't let charity grinch steal your holiday goodwill

Posted on Monday, Nov 27, 2017

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

CONTACT: Jerad Albracht, Senior Communications Specialist, 608-224-5007
Bill Cosh, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – Many consumers open their hearts and wallets during the holiday season, donating generously to charities. Unfortunately, the season of goodwill opens the market to scammers who use high-pressure pitches to gather funds through fake charities. Two state agencies ask consumers to do their research on charities before making a contribution this holiday season and to be leery of pushy phone- and internet-based requests for payments.

“If you enjoy making donations during the holidays, by all means, give generously...but donate wisely and with your eyes wide open,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). “Be suspicious of aggressive, out-of-the-blue requests for donations and always take the time to learn more about a charity before making a payment.”

Before donating, check with DATCP about any consumer complaints on file against the organization and check to see if the charity is registered with the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI).

“When people are considering a donation, they want to make sure that their donation is being put to good use by the charity,” said Mary Ann McCoshen,

Administrator of the DFI's Division of Corporate and Consumer Services. "Potential donors can check out how charities are using donations by looking into their spending levels on the DFI website at www.wdfl.org/CharitableOrganizations."

DATCP and DFI offer these tips for donors considering a contribution to a charitable organization:

- If contacted by phone, avoid being pressured to make an immediate donation. Don't hesitate to ask the caller to send you information about the organization and its programs.
- Ask a solicitor to explain the purpose of the organization, what services are provided, how much of the donation goes to fund-raising expenses, whether the donation is tax-deductible, and whether you will be sent a receipt.
- Donate to charities that you trust and are well-established.
- Watch out for "look-alike" sites or imposter websites. Scammers will often use names and websites that are similar to those of better-known, reputable organizations. Watch the spelling of the charity's name and web address (URL) closely.
- Be wary of unsolicited requests for donations, especially ones received by email or text.
- Criminals know that many people make year-end charitable contributions for tax purposes, so they may take a tax-related angle in pitching their scam.
- Never write out a check or give cash to an individual solicitor. Write out checks to the name of the organization or use a credit card.

For more information or to file a complaint, consumers may contact:

- DATCP on the web at datcp.wi.gov; by phone (Consumer Protection Hotline) at 800-422-7128; by e-mail at datcph hotline@wisconsin.gov; or at www.facebook.com/wiconsumer.
- DFI on the web at www.wdfl.org/CharitableOrganizations; by phone at 800-452-3328; or by e-mail at DFISecretary@wisconsin.gov.