

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: No pot of gold with rainbows, international lotteries

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MADISON - The mythical story of the “pot of gold” says to search for the treasure at the end of a rainbow, but scammers will have you believe that the pot of gold is coming directly to you. Among their favorite tricks are foreign lottery scams. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) warns that foreign lottery promotions are phony - and illegal.

“It is a violation of federal law to participate in a foreign lottery, but that doesn’t stop scammers from pitching them for a quick payout,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection. “Buying a phony lottery ticket sets you up for a double hit: you’ll lose money now and you’ll likely be added to a ‘sucker list’ and face an uptick in scam pitches in the future.”

DATCP occasionally hears from consumers who are tied up in a cycle of payments to scammers after falling for a fake foreign lottery pitch. Once a victim makes an initial payment for a phony prize entry, the scammer will continue to come back to the victim to ask for more money for additional tickets or fees and taxes on the supposed prize. Victims continue to make these payments out of fear of losing out on the prize they are expecting and also out of fear of losing the money they have already invested.

DATCP offers the following tips to avoid these and other prize scams:

It is illegal to enter foreign lotteries and there are no secret systems for winning them.

Ignore all mail and phone solicitations that promise big prizes in foreign lotteries or contests. If you receive what looks like lottery or sweepstakes material from a foreign country, destroy it or report it to the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

You should never have to pay to win a prize or to “improve” your chances of winning (unless you are entering a local raffle).

Never wire money, turn over the card numbers on a prepaid debit card or provide personal or banking information in response to an unsolicited offer.

Some scams may require you to call a “900” number to claim your prize. Calling this number will cost you a per-minute fee.

Legitimate contest offers will include rules, information on how to enter and the odds of winning.

For additional information, visit the Bureau of Consumer Protection at <http://datcp.wi.gov>, send an e-mail to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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