

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: With prices stabilizing, state ends 'Abnormal Economic Disruption' period

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MADISON – Effective July 3, 2020, Governor Tony Evers approved ending the declared period of abnormal economic disruption, allowing sellers to resume sale of consumer goods and services without the restrictions outlined in Wisconsin's price gouging statutes.

In March, Gov. Evers issued Executive Order #72. This order announced a public health emergency due to COVID-19 and declared a period of abnormal economic disruption, directing the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to enforce prohibitions against price gouging for consumer goods and services.

The end of the abnormal economic disruption declaration means that future price changes will not be subject to price increase prohibitions described in state law. Complaints about prices that existed before the end of the emergency declaration will continue to be investigated, even if those complaints are filed after the declaration has ended.

Since Governor Evers issued Executive Order #72 on March 12, DATCP has received a total of 725 price gouging complaints. Complaints have been in the following categories:

- 39% Grocery Items
- 32% Household Supplies

- 11% Personal Protective Equipment
- 18% other items

DATCP received the highest volume of complaints during the week of March 30 – April 3, when 191 new complaints were filed. As economic activities resume across the state, the DATCP has seen a decline in the volume of price gouging complaints. Currently, DATCP is receiving very few or no price gouging complaints daily.

Consumers should be aware that price increases during the COVID-19 pandemic may reflect temporary, legitimate disruptions in the supply chain. Consumers searching for the best pricing may consider waiting until the supply for that item stabilizes, substituting brands, or finding product alternatives based on availability to lower their overall costs.

Staff in the department's Bureau of Business Trade Practices have closed 35% of the complaints that have been received. Most retailers have been responsive and cooperative with the department's requests for information on these inquiries. DATCP's inquiries into price gouging complaints are ongoing and the agency will continue to monitor these complaints, even though the declaration has ended.

Questions about price gouging, scams, or other consumer issues should be directed to DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at (800) 422-7128 or by email: DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov. The department's Bureau of Consumer Protection is here to serve as a resource by providing information and assistance regarding current scams, consumer laws and publications, and the complaint process.