

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Don't get scammed this holiday season

Posted on Tuesday, Dec 13, 2022

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MADISON, Wis. – The winter holidays are a time of charity, gratitude, and gift-giving. Everyone is looking for the best deals and money-saving tricks. Scammers try to take advantage of consumers' holiday plans through rip-offs and fraudulent schemes. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) encourages all consumers to learn how to identify and avoid these common holiday scams:

- Delivery notification/shipping scams. Fake shipping companies may send consumers messages alerting them to a delivery and threatening to delay unless the consumers 'verify' private information. Sometimes there is an attachment to download, usually containing a virus.
 - Do not open these messages or provide any personal information. Contact the company directly using a verified customer service phone number or email address for a shipping status update.
- Giveaway scams. Consumers may receive messages claiming they have won a prize such as a gift card to a major retailer. The catch: consumers are asked to pay a small 'processing fee,' to complete a survey, or to provide some personal data before they can claim it.
 - Prizes do not require fees. Never engage with someone offering gift cards or other goods for "free," but with strings attached.
- Online marketplace scams. Social media platforms and other online marketplaces offer the option to buy and sell directly with other users. Scammers may pose as buyers or as sellers, and have a variety of strategies they use to fool consumers.
 - Be wary of buyers overpaying with checks – this is a sure sign of fraud; do

not refund them. Do not pay for items unless the seller can be confirmed as legitimate. Do not give personal information or move the conversation to an off-site channel.

- Pet scams. Pets are a popular holiday gift, but consumers should use caution when buying one online. Scammers will advertise pets, and when contacted claim the pets were already sold but that they know a faraway second seller with more options.
 - Ask for the name and location of the pet's veterinarian. Contact the vet using publicly available information to confirm the pet really exists. Never pay up-front for pets sold online.
- Ticket scams. Tickets to popular events can be expensive and in short supply. While many unofficial sellers and third-party websites are legitimate, watch for unreasonable prices and fake ticket sales.
 - Purchase tickets from official vendors that have established policies for cancellations and refunds.

For additional information and consumer protection resources or to file a complaint, visit DATCP's Consumer Protection webpage at [ConsumerProtection.wi.gov](https://www.wisconsin.gov/consumerprotection). If you have questions or believe you are a victim of a scam, report it by contacting DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline by phone at (800) 422-7128 or email at DATCPHotline@wi.gov.