

CONSUMER ALERT

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

datcp.wi.gov



Don't Get Swept Away in Sweepstakes Scams

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has recently received a handful of inquiries about possible sweepstakes scam operations. DATCP asks Wisconsin residents to be on the lookout for fraudulent calls and mailings that promise major prizes in exchange for a payment for “fees” or “taxes.”

While these pitches target everyone, these scammers are particularly keen on contacting seniors. Many older victims are enticed by the idea of paying off debts and leaving a windfall to their children and grandkids, and may be willing to suspend their disbelief long enough to make a quick payment or two for the supposed prize taxes and fees.

Fake lottery, sweepstakes and contest prize pitches are old scams that show no signs of going away. Protect yourself by remembering these tips:

- You should never have to pay to win a “free” prize – requests that you pay for taxes or fees before you receive a prize are a sure sign of a scam. Hang up on the caller or pitch the letter.
- Watch for claims that an award is from Publishers Clearing House (PCH) or is associated with another major brand name. Scammers often use this tactic to add legitimacy to their fraudulent claims. If you want to verify that a prize is from PCH, call PCH directly and inquire.
- If you are asked to cash a check and send back a portion for prize fees, it is a scam. The check is fake. If you cash it, it will bounce and you will owe your bank the money.
- It is a violation of federal law to play in an international lottery by phone or mail. Any claims that you have won an international lottery or that you have a chance to enter one should immediately register as fraudulent.
- Legitimate contests do not ask you to pay anything to “improve” your chances of winning (note: this does not apply to raffles).
- Watch out for high-pressure demands. A scammer may threaten that you will lose the prize if you tell anyone about it. They may also claim that it is a “one-time only” prize and demand that you stay on the phone until you make a payment.

For additional information or to inquire about a free prize notice you received, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wi.gov>, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128.

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