

Ho, Ho, Hold Onto Your Receipts and Other Return Tips

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MADISON – Gift shopping is a gamble. Despite all of your best efforts, your “perfect gift” may end up back on the store shelf hours after the package is unwrapped.

Given that even the best presents sometimes get returned or exchanged (think issues with size, color, style, etc.), planning ahead can be a great help to a gift recipient.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection asks shoppers to pay close attention to the different stores’ policies while they shop, to ask for gift receipts at the register and to keep all sales documentation organized and accessible throughout the holiday season.

“Every business has its own return and exchange policy, and a business may even have different policies to cover the different types of products it sells,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection. “To make a potential return or exchange easier for a gift recipient, ask about the business’s policy before you make the purchase, request a gift receipt and keep the original sales receipt on hand throughout the return period.”

Before you wrap the item, pack the gift receipt in the box or tape it to the front or side of the box to ensure it isn’t overlooked. Some stores will not honor a return or refund request without a receipt.

Additional return tips include:

- Stores are required by law to honor the return guidelines they represent to consumers. If the store’s policy is not posted, ask a salesperson or manager about the terms before making a purchase.
- Pay attention to the time frame allotted by the retailer for returns. Find out if the countdown to the last day for returns begins on the date of original purchase of the item or if there are extended holiday return deadlines.
- As you wrap gifts, leave the price tags and UPC codes intact and keep the original packaging. Some stores charge a restocking fee for opened items or those without their packaging – especially electronics.
- Review the conditions that apply when you buy items on sale or clearance. Some stores may not allow you to return these items.
- If you are shopping by phone or online, find out who pays return shipping fees if you have a problem with the product. Does the retailer pay those fees or does the consumer? Are return shipping fees deducted from the refund amount?
- Gift cards may not be returnable, so check the store’s policy before you purchase one.

If you believe a retailer is not honoring its posted return policy, file a complaint with the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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