



Brushing Scams

Have you received a package containing merchandise you didn't order? Perhaps you received a bracelet, sun glasses, or maybe empty packages arrive at your home every few days. These deliveries are likely part of a "brushing" scam.

There are steps you can take to protect yourself if you receive unordered packages as part of a brushing scam.

What is brushing?

Brushing is a scheme to create fake sales and reviews for a product. It is generally carried out by sellers who want to increase sales using positive online reviews. Sellers will mail unordered items to individuals and use the recipients' names to post positive online reviews for the product. These reviews appear legitimate because the scammer is able to post the review in the recipient's name often as a verified buyer. The reviews could be for any of the seller's products regardless of what, if any, product is sent. Scammers hope these additional orders and reviews will result in increased sales of the products.

What to do if you receive a package

If you have received a package that you did not order as part of a brushing scam, follow-up with these steps:

- If you have not opened the package and there is a return address, you may mark it "Return to Sender," and the United States Postal Service will return it.
- If you open the package and do not like what you find, you may throw it away.
- If you open the package and like what you find, you may keep it - for free. Under Wisconsin law (Wis. Stat. s. 241.28), unsolicited merchandise is considered a gift and may be kept without any obligation to the sender. It is illegal for a company that sends you unordered merchandise to later send you a bill.



Steps to take to protect against Identity Theft

Receiving an unsolicited package does not necessarily mean you are a victim of identity theft; however it is a good idea to take necessary steps to avoid becoming a victim.

Scammers may have obtained your name and mailing address from publically available information.

If a package appears to come from a company that you have an account with, you should

- Check your account.
- Notify the company of the delivery.
- Change your password.
- Watch for an invoice or an unauthorized charge on your credit card billing statement.

If you are concerned the scammer may have access to your personal information through your account with the company, obtain a free copy of your credit report. Monitoring your credit report regularly can provide important information about activity in your name. You can request a free credit report from each of the three credit report agencies annually. Request your report at: (877) 322-8228 or online at www.annualcreditreport.com.

You may also request a security freeze be placed on your credit reports. A security freeze is the best protection available for financial identity theft as it will prevent new lines of credit from being established without your consent. All three credit reporting agencies must be contacted directly in order to request that a free security freeze be placed on your credit report. A security freeze is permanent and will remain in place until you remove it.

To place a security freeze on your credit report contact the following credit reporting agencies at:

Equifax (888) 298-0045

Experian (888) 397-3742

TransUnion (888) 909-8872

You may also **file a complaint with the Bureau of Consumer Protection**. The Bureau of Consumer Protection does attempt to locate the business that send unsolicited packages. However, many of these businesses are in foreign countries and locating them may be difficult. The Bureau will record your complaint and it will be included in information provided to consumers who inquire about the business for a three-year period.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact:

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection
Bureau of Consumer Protection
2811 Agriculture Drive, PO Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911

Email: DATCPHotline@wi.gov

Website: datcp.wi.gov

(800) 422-7128 TTY: (608) 224-5058