



DATCP and Wisconsin Elections Commission Help Consumers Avoid Election Scams

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DATCP Contact: Ti Gauger, Public Information Officer, 608-224-5007, Ti.Gauger@Wisconsin.gov

Wisconsin Elections Commission Contact: Reid Magney, Public Information Officer. 608-267-7887, Reid.Magney@wi.gov

MADISON – With the November 3 general election rapidly approaching, many groups are reaching out to Wisconsin voters, most legitimate but some not. Some contacts may look like scams but are just groups using poorly trained volunteers or bad data. Scammers are turning to election-related tactics to try to steal your money and identity. Voting scams trick you by mimicking legitimate activities that happen around elections. Some examples include:

Fraudulent Donation Requests

Real: Political campaigns often call or text their supporters to ask for donations.

Scam: A scammer might use spoofing technology to use a legitimate phone number to impersonate a campaign representative.

How to avoid it: Be wary of unsolicited calls asking for donations. Only make donations through platforms you know and trust, such as the campaign’s official website. Avoid sending donations through another person or over the phone.

Imposter Election Surveys

Real: Research organizations conduct phone surveys throughout the election season to gauge voters’ interests, opinions, and perspectives.

Questionable: Some candidates and advocacy groups use fake polls or “push-polls” to influence your vote, or they may try to disguise who is responsible for the poll. Under state law, anyone conducting a poll is required to tell you the name and address of the person or committee paying for the poll, if you ask. If they won’t tell you who is paying for the poll, hang up.

Scam: Impersonators offer you a gift card or some other incentive to participate in a fake survey, but first they need your personal information, such as a credit card number, date of birth, or social security number.

How to avoid it: Do not rely on Caller ID; scammers can “spoof” the phone number of a legitimate organization to make it appear as though the call is a genuine campaign contact. Never provide account or credit card information to anyone you did not reach out to, especially someone claiming you can win a prize.

Registering to Vote

Real: Volunteers or staff from civic and political organizations may contact potential voters through calls, texts, social media, or even in-person to help drive voter registration and turnout.

Questionable: Some organizations with incorrect data may contact you in the belief that you have been removed from the voter list and offer to reregister you. They may direct you to a website that collects personal information, which they use to contact you with reminders and political messages.

Scam: Scammers also make alarming claims and pretend to alert you to an expired voter registration as a phishing attempt. The scammer then offers to register you, and during the process collects a large amount of personal information they may use to steal your identity.

How to avoid it: The Wisconsin Elections Commission or your local clerk's office will not text you with voter registration alerts, so you may ignore these kinds of text messages. Unofficial websites seeking personal information to check your voter registration status or register you to vote should be avoided. You can securely register, check your registration status, and find trusted information on the MyVote Wisconsin website at <https://myvote.wi.gov>. You can also register by mail, in-person at your local municipal clerk's office, or at the polling place on Election Day. Your municipal clerk's office is another trusted source of information.

Voting by Absentee Ballot

Real: On September 1, the Wisconsin Elections Commission mailed an educational packet to all registered voters who had not already applied for an absentee ballot.

You can request an absentee ballot online at <https://myvote.wi.gov> or you can fill out the paper application form included in the mailing and submit it using the postage-paid return envelope. You should request your ballot as far in advance of the election as possible. The legal deadline for your application to be received is Thursday, October 29, 2020; however, voters should request them much earlier due to USPS requirements for one week to deliver mail in each direction.

Also Real: Political parties and candidates may also mail out absentee ballot requests to their supporters. They may also email, text, or call you with messages urging you to return your absentee ballot. State law allows them to purchase lists of voters who have requested absentee ballots.

Questionable: Independent groups send out texts offering to send you an absentee ballot when it is really an absentee ballot application. Groups also send out mailers with absentee ballot forms which may appear to be from your municipal clerk's office. Some of these forms are already partially filled out with names and addresses, some of which may be incorrect due to faulty mailing lists. Sometimes they claim you have not already requested an absentee ballot or the return addresses for clerks are incorrect. Also, the requirements for voters to provide a copy of their photo ID with the application are not always clearly stated.

Scams: If a call or text claims to be coming from a government entity and offers an absentee ballot for people who cannot or do not want to go to the polls on Election Day, it may be a scam. Scammers may be using this as a ruse to collect a large amount of personal information and steal your identity.

How to avoid it: Never provide personally identifying information or account numbers to a person who contacts you unexpectedly. If you have questions about voting by absentee ballot, you can contact your local municipal clerk or visit MyVote Wisconsin at <https://myvote.wi.gov>.

For additional information on scams and consumer issues, or to file a consumer complaint, visit the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) at <http://datcp.wi.gov>, send an e-mail to datcphotline@wi.gov, or call DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

For concerns regarding Wisconsin elections, more information can be found at <https://elections.wi.gov/complaints>.

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