



Scammers Target Unsuspecting Pet Seekers

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MADISON - The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is urging consumers to use caution when purchasing a new pet online, after receiving multiple reports of scammers stealing money from unsuspecting purchasers.

How does this scam work?

Scammers post pictures online of what appear to be legitimate puppies or kittens for sale. They may even seem to be in the buyer's local area. Once contacted, the seller claims to have just sold their last animal and instead offers information about a second seller further away who may be able to help. This tactic prevents buyers from meeting the animal in person before purchasing.

When buyers reach out to the second seller and agree to purchase an animal, that seller will require payment using an untraceable and non-refundable method, like a money transfer app. After the initial payment, the scammer may claim to need more money for transport fees, licenses, or permits. By the time the buyer becomes suspicious and demands a refund, the seller disappears without ever delivering the animal they advertised.

"Wisconsin consumers have lost thousands of dollars to these scams in recent months," reports Lara Sutherlin, Administrator, Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. "We urge people to use caution when making purchases from online marketplaces and to contact the Consumer Protection Hotline at (800) 422-7128 if they have been a victim of a scam."

Consumers can avoid falling victim to these pet scams by following the tips below:

Verify the business. An easy way to do this is to search for the person or business online. Adding the term "scam" or "fraud" to your search terms could also help you spot a potential scam. Do not send money or give out personal information until you have been able to verify the legitimacy of the person or business.

Ask for the name and location of their veterinarian. If the seller provides this information, search for the veterinarian online and contact their office using a publicly listed number rather than the one provided by the seller. A list of veterinarians licensed in Wisconsin is also available on the datcp.wi.gov website.

Do not pay upfront. This makes it easy for scammers to take your money and disappear. Additionally, consider how you pay. Credit cards have significant fraud protection built-in, but cash apps, gift cards, and money wires are often untraceable and non-refundable.

Slow down and double-check. Scammers benefit when you make decisions in a hurry. They may tell you their supply is limited, or that they have someone else interested. Slow down and double-check their story, consult an expert, or talk to a friend or family member. Do not give in to high-pressure sales tactics.

If you have been the victim of a scam, file a consumer complaint with DATCP. Make a report online at datcp.wi.gov or by contacting the Consumer Information Hotline at (800) 422-7128 or DATCPHotline@Wisconsin.gov and requesting a complaint form.

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