



DATCP Releases Top Ten Consumer Complaints for 2016 Imposter Scams Behind Spike in Wisconsin Telemarketing Complaints

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MADISON – Threatening phone calls about unpaid taxes. Calls offering to lower your credit card interest rate. Fake tech support calls warning about problems with your computer.

Wisconsin consumers’ phones were attacked in 2016 by imposters looking to steal money or personal information. Telemarketing calls topped the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP) list of consumer complaints for 2016, and it is obvious these malicious imposter calls had a striking effect on the overall count. DATCP received 3,685 telemarketing complaints last year, an increase of nearly 45% over 2015.

“We heard from consumers, loud and clear, that these phone calls were a troubling and unwelcome interruption in their daily lives last year,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “The crooks behind these calls have no regard for your schedule or piece of mind and will use any trick to convince you to turn over money or personal information.”

Scam calls claiming to come from the Internal Revenue Service or United States Treasury were the leading imposter calls in 2016, followed by “Card Services” credit card reduction and computer tech support calls (commonly known as “Microsoft tech support” scams).

“Phone scammers can ‘spoof’ or change what displays on your caller ID, so that information may not be trustworthy,” said Frassetto. “Don’t engage with questionable callers and report the calls to DATCP so we can track these operations and warn others,” said Frassetto.

“When consumers report their experiences with fraudulent calls by filing a complaint, we are able to share this information with our federal partners,” said Frassetto. “A recent crackdown on a major IRS phone scam operation in India is a prime example of how the information gathered at the state level can help build a case against operators both within our country and abroad.”

One promising highlight from the 2016 complaint list is the significant drop in identity theft complaints (fourth on the list, down from third in 2015). Wisconsin consumers filed 431 identity theft complaints with DATCP in 2016, down almost 48% from 2015. 75% of identity theft complaints in 2016 involved tax-related identity theft (where a fake tax return is filed using a victim’s identity).

“A consumer’s best protection against identity theft is to take additional precautionary steps like limiting the amount of information they share unnecessarily and using two-factor authentication and complex passwords for online accounts,” said Frassetto.

Landlord/Tenant complaints dropped significantly in 2016 but remained in the number two slot on the list. Complaint allegations typically included disputes over security deposits, unauthorized entry, inadequate disclosures and evictions.

“The key to a productive relationship between landlords and tenants is to keep an open dialogue and to understand each party’s rights under the law,” said Frassetto.

To help both parties stay abreast of changes in residential laws, DATCP offers a comprehensive Landlord/Tenant Guide that outlines state laws regarding landlord/tenant relations. This free document is available both on the DATCP website and by calling the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128.

(MORE)

Telecommunications-related issues moved up one spot to number three in 2016 despite a decrease in complaints. The telecommunications category includes bundling of services, cellular phones, internet service providers, long distance services, and satellite and cable television. Misrepresentations and excessive or unauthorized charges were the main issues expressed in the complaints.

Home improvement remained at number five on the list in 2016. Some of the major factors in home improvement complaints included allegations of misrepresentation, failure to honor contracts, workmanship and theft.

Rounding out the top ten for 2016 were the gas pump accuracy (6th); motor vehicle repair (7th); motor vehicle sales (8th); computer and equipment (9th); and warranties (10th) complaint categories.

“In reviewing 2016 complaints for common themes, it’s clear that there are best practices consumers should follow,” said Frassetto. “Don’t give out your personal information over the phone or wire money to a stranger, refuse high-pressure sales pitches, request all information in writing, and read the fine print before you sign.”

For additional information on the Top Ten Consumer Complaints of 2016 list or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wi.gov, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128, or send an email to datcph hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS
YEAR 2016**

<u>2016 RANK</u>	<u>PRODUCT CATEGORY</u>	<u>2016 - # OF COMPLAINTS</u>	<u>2015 - # OF COMPLAINTS</u>
1	Telemarketing	3,685	2,550
2	Landlord/Tenant	1,121	1,407
3	Telecommunications	698	754
4	Identity Theft	431	823
5	Home Improvement	383	426
6	Gas Pump Accuracy	266	251
7	Motor Vehicle Repair	200	270
8	Motor Vehicle Sales (New and Used)	173	220
9	Computer and Equipment	152	124
10	Warranties	138	76

10,346 complaints were recorded by
the Bureau of Consumer Protection in 2016

455 complaints (includes the Gas Pump Accuracy category)
were recorded by the Bureau of Weights and Measures in 2016