



**State of Wisconsin**  
*Department of Financial Institutions*

Scott Walker, **Governor**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Be on the alert for ‘secret shopper,’  
foreign lottery scams, state agency warns**

MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) is advising citizens to be aware of recent scams involving “secret shopper” programs and foreign lotteries. These scams have been very active recently with such offers received by numerous Wisconsin residents over the past several months. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service estimates that nationally consumers have lost more than \$42 million to scammers over the past three years.

One of the main techniques scammers use is to mail unsolicited checks to victims with instructions to cash the checks and then wire most of the money to an unknown location. In two common variations of the scam, victims are told either that they have won a foreign lottery, or that they have been selected to participate in a “secret shopper” program. In the lottery scheme, the victim must cash the check and wire funds to pay “taxes and fees” before receiving the entire winnings. In the “secret shopper” scam, the victim is told that they have been selected to rate the service of certain retailers.

In both cases, the checks are counterfeit and, once discovered, the victims are responsible for repaying the money to the banks where the checks were cashed. Unfortunately, by then the consumers’ funds have been wired out of the country with no way to recover them.

DFI offers these tips for consumers:

- Be suspicious of unsolicited letters asking you to cash checks and forward funds via wire. These are almost always scams.
- Do not accept unsolicited offers of employment, no matter how good they seem.
- If you are unsure of the validity of an offer, contact the company or individual listed on the check and ask if they actually issued it. Get a telephone number from directory assistance or another official source, rather than relying on information that might be supplied by the scammer.
- Consumers should be aware that playing a foreign lottery through the mail or over the phone is a violation of federal law.
- Remember, if an offer seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Consumers who have received offers that are bogus or appear to be bogus should contact DFI Division of Securities Examiner James Lackey Jr. at 608-266-1365.

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