

# CONSUMER ALERT

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection [datcp.wisconsin.gov](http://datcp.wisconsin.gov)



## Jamaican Scams on the Rise

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MADISON – White sand beaches, plentiful sun, reggae music...and international phone scams?

When most people think of Jamaica, they imagine a tropical paradise, not a scammer's paradise. But time and time again, Jamaican scammers call Wisconsin residents looking for easy money through phony stories about Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes winnings, lottery prizes and free cars.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is asking Wisconsin residents to be on the lookout for potential phone scams originating from Jamaica. The Consumer Protection Bureau has already received more than a dozen written complaints this year from Wisconsin residents who were contacted by Jamaican scammers.

One telling sign of a scam is if your caller ID notes that a questionable call is coming from a phone number with an "876" prefix – this is the area code for Jamaica. The process for making a call to and from the island is just like calling state-to-state, so many call recipients may not realize that the contact is actually coming from overseas.

The scammers often claim to represent Publishers Clearing House, "Mega Millions" or a similar organization. Their goal is to convince American residents to wire money or send the card number from a MoneyPak "Green Dot" pre-paid debit card overseas to cover the fees on a phony lottery sum that is supposed to be delivered to their home. The scammers request anywhere from \$20 to more than \$1,000 for these delivery fees.

In other variations on the scam, callers have claimed to be from Bank of America or have used an opening line about "lowering interest." The scammer may also engage the call recipient in a conversation about religion or family in order to earn the person's trust.

The scammers are not simply cold calling – they are also using online mapping technology to add legitimacy to their calls. When scammers claim that the "prize patrol" is in the call recipient's neighborhood *right now*, they can describe the area in detail using free web-based mapping tools.

To avoid being the victim of a Jamaican phone scam, Consumer Protection offers the following tips:

- If you receive a phone call from an 876 area code that asks you for payment in order to secure a prize, hang up immediately and file a complaint with the Consumer Protection Bureau. If you have caller ID, record the incoming phone number and the time of the call.
- If the scammers reach you once they may call repeatedly, so check your caller ID before you pick up.
- Any request for a wire transfer or pre-paid debit card for a product or service is likely a scam.
- The scammers will not provide any legitimate documentation prior to requesting your prize delivery fees. This is illegal in Wisconsin. A promoter who represents that a consumer is eligible or has been selected to receive a prize **MUST** provide the consumer with a written prize notice with specific disclosures **BEFORE** requesting or accepting any payments.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at [datcp.wisconsin.gov](http://datcp.wisconsin.gov), send an e-mail to [datcp@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcp@wisconsin.gov) or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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