



## Consumer Alert: Tree Removal Scammers Reported After Storms

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MADISON, Wis. – Recent storms have caused damage across northeastern Wisconsin, leading some consumers to seek removal services for trees and branches that have fallen on their homes, businesses, or property. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) advises property owners to be skeptical of door-to-door solicitors who offer incredible deals for removal and cleanup services.

Consumers have recently reported being visited at their homes by a tree removal company and told all charges for their services would be covered by insurance and billed directly. After the work was completed, the bills were outrageously expensive and often not covered by insurance. In one case, a consumer was threatened with a lien filing if they did not pay within 30 days, and, in another instance, the bill was almost as expensive as the home itself.

DATCP encourages consumers to ask for contractor recommendations from trusted sources such as friends, neighbors, and insurance agents. Always confirm a business is permitted to operate in your area before contracting for work, get all promises and contracts in writing, and never let a door-to-door solicitor into your home. Property owners with storm damage should:

- Make a list and take photographs of damage or clean up needs.
- Ask municipal officials if a contractor holds permits for door-to-door sales in their area.
- Request a copy of the contractor’s certificate of liability insurance.
- Obtain written contracts that specify exactly what work will be done, a start and completion date.
- Keep copies of all receipts, contracts, and correspondence.

Wisconsin’s storm chaser law aims to prevent insurance fraud. Contractors:

- Cannot promise to pay any portion of an owner’s property insurance deductible.
- Cannot negotiate with an insurance company on behalf of a customer. Contractors can only discuss damages and costs with insurers with the customer’s permission.
- Must ask if the requested work is related to an insurance claim before entering a contract.
- Must notify customers of their right to cancel the contract within three business days if the customer is notified that their insurer has denied any portion of the claim for work.

For additional information and consumer protection resources or to file a complaint, visit [ConsumerProtection.wi.gov](http://ConsumerProtection.wi.gov). If you have questions, want to check for complaints against a business, or believe you have been scammed, contact DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline at (800) 422-7128 or [DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov).

If Wisconsinites encounter any issues with their insurance agent, adjuster, or company, they are encouraged to contact the Officer of the Commissioner of Insurance at (800) 236-8517 or visit [oci.wi.gov](http://oci.wi.gov) for more information about filing a complaint.

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