



PREVENTING & HANDLING CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

Preventing Consumer Complaints

Many consumer problems can be prevented before they begin by following these simple guidelines:

- Be sure you understand the store's return or exchange policy before you buy. Contrary to popular belief, stores are not legally required to give your money back unless the merchandise is defective or unfit for its intended purpose. Even then, the store may elect to repair or exchange the merchandise.
- Always get several estimates for any major purchase or service contract. Shop around.
- Never sign a contract before reading it. Never sign a blank contract that a salesperson says will be filled in later.
- Always keep your receipts, cancelled cheques, warranties, estimates, contracts and instructions. They will be useful in problem solving.
- If you have a complaint, you are most likely to resolve it if you start with the person closest to the problem. If you're unsuccessful, take your complaint to someone who has more authority, such as the manager. Record names of the people you contact and the information they give.

When consumer problems arise

Most businesses will be pleased to help solve your consumer problems. Customer goodwill is still one of the best forms of advertising. A complaint doesn't have to be a negative experience. Handled correctly, the store gains goodwill and the consumer benefits. Here are some pointers for success:

- Make sure your complaint is justified.
- Give the business a chance to solve your problem.
- If there is a complaint service in the store where you made your purchase, use it. If not, speak to someone in a position of authority, such as a manager. Be firm, be polite.
- Ask how and when something will be done and get the person's name in case you need to refer to the conversation later.

- If a personal visit doesn't produce results, write a letter to the manager. Provide all the details and ask for action. Be sure to keep a copy of your letter.
- If all fails, you can consider contacting the Fair Trading Commission or the Office of Public Counsel which provides mediation and arbitration services in disputes which cannot be settled through compromise or legal action.