

Got a lemon?

Consumer products today have a major impact on the safety, comfort and convenience of our daily lives. When the products we depend on turn out to be shoddy or unsafe, there are literally hundreds of agencies and departments ready to answer your inquiries or investigate any valid complaint. If you're seeking advice or action, here is some guidance for identifying the organizations that can best assist you.

When manufacturers display the CSA mark on their products, they are telling consumers their products comply with Canadian Standards Association requirements. Some CSA certification programs (eg. electrical) are mandatory, while others are voluntary. Since manufacturers are under no legal obligation to obtain certification on CSA's many voluntary programs, the wise consumer will check for the CSA mark before purchasing. Presence of the mark will assure you that the product has met certain safety and/or performance criteria.

CSA protects the public and preserves the integrity of the CSA

mark by means of spot-checks of CSA-certified products carried out by its field representatives. If, in spite of these efforts, you do encounter a safety-related problem with a certified item, CSA's Audits and Investigations Division wants to hear from you. Call or Write: Audits and Investigations, Canadian Standards Association, 178 Rexdale Blvd., Rexdale (Toronto), M9W 1R3, 416 747-4278.

Safety problems with gas-fired appliances should be directed to the Standards Department, Canadian Gas Association, 55 Scarsdale Road, Don Mills, Ontario, M3B 2R3, 416 447-6465.

In general, your complaints with the quality or cost of repairing a product should start with a visit to the retailer or dealer.

If this fails to resolve your complaint, you should follow up with a registered letter to the store or manufacturer's head office, including full details of your purchase (such as date purchased, price, copies of receipts or warranties, reason for wishing a refund or replacement) and your name, address and telephone

number. Always keep originals of receipts.

If this doesn't work, you can still turn to a number of watchdog agencies. Depending on the type of product involved, you may be able to get results through industry organizations, the Better Business Bureau, your local Chamber of Commerce, your provincial or federal government departments concerned with consumer protection or regulation of businesses, or, if all else fails, perhaps even your local Small Claims Court.

The Consumers' Association of Canada, a national not-for-profit organization involved with quality monitoring and product testing, operates a referral service directing all calls of letters to the appropriate company or government department. Referral calls from across Canada are taken at CAC's Ontario branch office, 234 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 403, Toronto, M4P 1K5, 416 481-6864.

Don't overlook regulatory assistance in pursuing your complaints. All the provinces and territories have laws to protect your rights against defective goods or unfair business practices. In questions of contractual disputes, unethical conduct or misrepresentation of merchandise, in particular, you should contact the Ontario Ministry

