

# Consumers should know to contact proper department

Ontario's Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations gets many phone calls from people who should be calling the federal department, Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada, to get help with something. And vice versa.

To better understand who does what in consumer matters, consumers should know the differences between the two government departments and their responsibilities.

Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada is generally concerned with matters relating to the production, packaging, distribution and advertising of products. Ontario's Consumer Ministry is involved more with matters related to transactions between consumers and businesses.

Many common consumer complaints, such as those about contracts, merchandise that doesn't perform as advertised, or the selling practices of real-estate agents, motor-vehicle dealers, and travel agents, come under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Ministry's Business Practices Division.

Staff in this office regulate these businesses, as well as collection agencies, consumer-reporting agencies, cemeteries and funeral services.

Many people become familiar with the consumer-services section of this division. Eight Consumer Services Bureaus across Ontario receive thousands of complaints a year from people who believe they've been treated unfairly. Consumers contact the provincial offices by letter, phone and in person. Service bureau staff help mediate their disputes.

The division is also associated with the Ontario New Home Warranty Program, which protects people buying new houses, and the Ontario Motor Vehicle Arbitration Plan, put in place to help settle disputes about defects in new vehicles sold in Ontario.

The ministry's Technical Standards Division works to help ensure public safety. While most of its offices don't have much direct contact with consumers, one section of the division is well known to people interested in crafts.

The Upholstered and Stuffed Articles Branch tests and inspects such items as sleeping bags and children's stuffed toys to ensure only clean, new fill is used by manufacturers. People who make stuffed articles for sale in Ontario must be licensed by the branch.

Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada (CCAC) is also interested in the safety of consumer products, particularly when the well-being of children is at stake. The ministry inspects cribs, strollers, pacifiers, and children's car seats as well as checking textile flammability and household chemicals.

In addition to safety standards, the federal department investigates many other types of complaints about consumer products. The packaging, labelling, composition, quantity and quality standards of foods, textiles, precious metals and pre-packaged non-food products are all federal concerns.

Misleading advertising and deceptive marketing practices are also investigated by the CCAC. The regulation of advertising is an area that can help consumers understand the difference between federal and provincial responsibilities.

False and misleading advertising are prohibited by the federal department whether anyone actually buys the goods falsely advertised or not. The provincial consumer ministry steps in after a consumer has purchased the

product and found it doesn't live up to the advertised claims.

Other federal protection for consumers is provided by the CCAC's program to inspect retailers' weigh scales, and the natural-gas and electricity meters used to measure home consumption.

Recognizing that many consumers will wish to know more about who does what in consumer

matters, the federal and provincial consumer departments have joined forces to produce a fact sheet by that title.

The sheet was produced as a special aid to people in Ontario, in recognition of National Consumer Week. This nationwide celebration, scheduled April 22-28, promotes the theme "Team up for a stronger marketplace". The tip sheet is an example of the

theme in action.

Consumers wishing to receive a free copy of Who does what in consumer matters? should contact the Consumer Information Centre at the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, 1st fl., 555 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario, M7A 2H6. Information on a variety of other consumer topics is also available from the centre. The telephone

number in the Toronto area is (416)326-8555, or toll free 1-800-268-1142 for people from other parts of the province. The TDD line is (416)326-8568.

For information from the federal department Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada, write to the Ontario Regional Office, Ste. 601, 4900 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6B8, or call (416)224-4031.

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