

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Releases top ten consumer complaints for 2017

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MADISON – Telemarketing continues its streak at the top of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP) annual list of consumer complaints. DATCP received 4,147 telemarketing complaints last year, an increase of more than 12% over the 2016 total and a 62% increase over 2015.

“It is critical that consumers continue to report the unwanted and unsolicited calls they receive to DATCP,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection. “In an effort to enforce the state’s Do Not Call laws, DATCP follows up on every telemarketing complaint we receive and attempts to identify the caller. We also use the complaint information to identify trends, warn the public, and help our federal partners build nationwide cases against the scammers behind the calls.”

A significant number of 2017 telemarketing complaints were about unsolicited calls to renew extended automotive warranty service contracts and to lower credit card interest rates. Imposter scams were also a major issue last year, with scammers falsely claiming to represent government agencies and well-known businesses such as the Internal Revenue Service, utility companies and “Microsoft Tech Support” in an attempt to rip off call recipients.

The goal of these scams is to trick you into making a payment or to unwittingly share your personal information. Thankfully, most of the reports DATCP received about scams last year were from consumers who did not fall for the ruse.

The rest of the top five complaint categories include:

#2) Landlord/Tenant (1,141 complaints; up 20 from 2016)

Complaints commonly involved security deposit returns, evictions, unauthorized entries, inadequate disclosures, and unsatisfactory services.

#3) Telecommunications (763 complaints; up 65 from 2016)

This category pertains to complaints involving long distance, cellular phone, internet, satellite, and cable services as well as bundled service packages.

Complaints commonly involve a failure to meet the terms of an agreement, misrepresentations, billing problems, and refund policies.

#4) Identity Theft (453 complaints; up 22 from 2016)

Complaints involved data breaches, tax identity theft, and fraud.

#5) Home Improvement (403 complaints; up 20 from 2016)

Complaints commonly involved a failure to provide services, charges for work not provided, failures to honor warranties, improper installations, and poor workmanship.

While the top five categories held the same order as in 2016, there were two newcomers to the Top Ten this year:

A brand-new category for the 2017 year, Medical Services debuted at #7 with 195 complaints. The primary complaint issues for this category were billing disputes, misrepresentations, and unauthorized charges. This category covers medical services related to clinics, hospitals, and professional services in the medical field. It does not include complaints about medical devices or products.

Fuel Quality entered the list at #10 with 113 complaints (up 33 from 2016) received by DATCP's Bureau of Weights and Measures. These complaints centered on concerns about the quality of fuel at retail stations.

Rounding out the remainder of the list:

#6) Gas Pumps (232 complaints; down 34 from 2016)

These complaints (received by the Bureau of Weights and Measures) involved concerns about gas pump accuracy and credit card skimmers in gas pumps.

#8) Motor Vehicle Repair (182 complaints; down 18 from 2016)

Complaints commonly involved unauthorized charges, workmanship, and failures to provide services or honor warranties.

#9) Motor Vehicle Sales (149 complaints; down 24 from 2016)

Complaints involved inadequate disclosures and misrepresentations.

In all, DATCP received 10,756 complaints to the Bureau of Consumer Protection and another 456 to the Bureau of Weights & Measures. The agency returned nearly \$2.7 million in funds to Wisconsin – the majority of which were returned to consumers in the form of mediated refunds, negotiated settlements or court-ordered restitutions.

“As always, DATCP encourages Wisconsin residents to reach out to our agency for fact sheets and information or to file a complaint if they cannot resolve a situation with a business,” said Reinen.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <https://datcp.wi.gov>, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov.

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