



Consumer Protection Announces 2011 Top Complaints

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MADISON – The nation's fastest growing crime is now the source of Wisconsin's fastest rising group of consumer complaints. Making its first appearance on the annual top ten chart, identity theft ranks fifth in the "Top Ten Consumer Complaints of 2011" list released today by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

"For identity thieves, accessing personal information like social security numbers, credit card numbers, and financial account information is like winning the lottery," said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection. "Remember that identity thieves will do or say anything to get their hands on your personal information."

Chalmers said that consumers should use extreme caution when sharing personal information online and should keep an eye on credit reports and bank statements. Irregular activity should be reported immediately to your bank or credit card company.

Within the identity theft category, consumers most often reported fraudulent use of personal information or being the victim of a data breach. Wisconsin's data breach law requires that companies notify victims within 45 days of becoming aware of the breach.

For the ninth year in a row, telemarketing complaints led by "No Call List" violations topped the annual count. Consumers filed 1,669 telemarketing complaints in 2011.

"Every day, we receive dozens of calls from Wisconsin consumers who are fed up with robocalls from 'Rachel' about lowering their credit card interest rates," said Chalmers. "Most of these pre-recorded solicitations are illegal. If you want to stop getting fraudulent robocalls, the best thing to do is to hang up. Don't press a number to speak to a live person or to 'opt-out' of future calls, because that validates your phone number as an active account."

Chalmers said the best way to limit the number of legitimate telemarketing calls you receive on your home or cell line is to sign up your phone numbers for the No Call List at 1-866-9NOCALL or online at nocall.wisconsin.gov. Telemarketers who knowingly and repeatedly violate the policy are investigated and can face fines and prosecution.

Telecommunications complaints against telephone and internet services jumped to second in the 2011 list with 1,272 written complaints. This number is due in large part to billing issues and bundling of services.

"Keep a close eye on your phone, internet and cable bills and question any charges you are unsure about," said Chalmers. "Read the fine print and make sure you fully understand your responsibilities before entering into any sort of service contract."

Landlord/tenant issues dropped to third in this year's complaint list with 837 written complaints, with most complaints relating to security deposit and lease provisions.

Home improvement issues retained their spot as fourth on the list with 338 complaints.

Complaints about gas pump accuracy tied with identity theft for fifth with 225 complaints. Rounding out the top ten are the categories of motor vehicle sales (6); furniture/home furnishings (7); motor vehicle repairs (8); satellite dish (9); and (tied) dentistry and contest/sweepstakes/prize promotions (10).

DATCP recorded 10,220 new formal written complaints and closed 10,304 existing complaints in 2011.

(MORE)

For more consumer information or to file a consumer complaint, visit the Bureau of Consumer Protection's website at datcp.wi.gov; send an email to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov; or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

TOP TEN CONSUMER COMPLAINTS OF 2011

RANK		# OF
<u>IN 2011</u>	<u>PRODUCT/PROBLEM</u>	<u>COMPLAINTS</u>

The top ten product categories are:

1	Telemarketing (No-Call)	1,669
2	Telecommunications	1,272
3	Landlord/Tenant	837
4	Home Improvement	338
5	Identity Theft & Gasoline Pump Accuracy	225
6	Motor Vehicle Sales	211
7	Furniture / Home Furnishings	198
8	Motor Vehicle Repair	189
9	Satellite Dish	185
10	Dentistry & Contest / Sweepstakes / Prize Promotions	173