



Consumer Protection Announces 2012 Top Complaints

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Editor's Note: The complete top ten list with complaint counts can be found on the second page of this .pdf file.

MADISON – The complaints have been counted, and it is clear that “Robo Rachel” had a field day with Wisconsin consumers in 2012. For the tenth straight year, telemarketing complaints ranked first on the “Top Ten Consumer Complaints” list released today by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

“Our best advice is to hang up on robocalls,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “If you press a key or wait to speak to an operator, it lets the scammers know your number is active, and you will end up getting even more calls.”

At 1,983 written complaints, telemarketing complaints were more than double the count of the second category on the list: landlord/tenant (940 complaints). Illegal robocalls are such a nationwide nuisance that the Federal Trade Commission recently announced a \$50,000 prize to any person or business that could figure out how to stop or block these calls to consumers. DATCP sent telemarketers 301 cease and desist notices in 2012.

“If you feel like your phone is ringing off the hook with these illegal calls, you’re not alone,” noted Chalmers. “Technology makes it cheap and easy for crooks to make millions of calls a day from anywhere in the world.”

Chalmers said the best way to limit the number of legitimate telemarketing calls you receive on your home or cell line is to register your phone numbers to the state’s No Call List online at <http://nocall.wisconsin.gov> or by calling 1-866-9NOCALL. Telemarketers who knowingly and repeatedly violate the policy are investigated and can face fines and prosecution.

Identity theft is another crime that is on the rise both nationwide and in Wisconsin. In its second year on the top ten list, identity theft was ranked fourth with 508 complaints, up one spot from last year and more than double the number of complaints from 2011.

“Identity thieves are always on the lookout for easy ways to steal your banking information and personal details like your social security number,” said Chalmers. “Never give out personal information on an unsolicited phone call, email or text. Use caution when you share information online, keep an eye on your bank statements and check your credit report annually.”

Flanking identity theft on the top ten list were the telecommunications (third, 693 complaints) and home improvement (fifth, 391 complaints) categories. Rounding out the list from sixth to tenth are the categories of appliances (major), motor vehicle sales, gas pump accuracy, motor vehicle repair and contests/sweepstakes/prize promotions.

The appliances (major) category is the only entry in this year’s top ten list that did not appear in the 2011 list. The rise of this category is due to more than 200 written complaints filed against Appliance World, a Milwaukee-area business that shut down multiple retail locations in January 2012 with no notice to consumers. Customers who were waiting for delivery of appliances they had already paid for were left empty-handed in the closure. As a result of the Bureau of Consumer Protection’s efforts, more than \$89,000 in goods and refunds were returned to consumers following an investigation and settlement.

In total, DATCP recorded 10,061 new formal written complaints in 2012.

(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 2012

<u>RANK</u>		<u># OF</u>
<u>IN 2012</u>	<u>PRODUCT/PROBLEM</u>	<u>COMPLAINTS</u>

The top ten product categories are:

1	Telemarketing (No-Call)	1,983
2	Landlord/Tenant	940
3	Telecommunications	693
4	Identity Theft	508
5	Home Improvement	391
6	Appliances – Major	298
7	Motor Vehicle Sales	248
8	Gas Pump Accuracy	221
9	Motor Vehicle Repair	191
10	Contest / Sweepstakes / Prize Promotions	141