



## National Consumer Protection Week: Open Communication Key to Handling Telecommunications Disputes

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*It's National Consumer Protection Week! The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) recognizes this annual campaign as a way to teach people about their consumer rights and to give them the tools they need to protect themselves from scams.*

*This week, DATCP will look at the top five consumer complaints from 2016, providing insight into the nature of the complaints and safety tips to follow throughout 2017.*

### Consumer Protection Week, Day Three: Telecommunications

Think about the entertainment and connectivity services you use: internet, cell or landline phones, cable or satellite television and more. These are all examples of telecommunications services.

Telecommunications offerings are typically sold separately or bundled together (by one or more companies) under a monthly service charge, the terms of which can be confusing.

Given the demand for telecommunications services and the confusion that can result from complex billing and packaging, it is no wonder the telecommunications category of complaints was near the top (#3) of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)'s annual list of consumer complaints in 2016.

Misrepresentations, billing disputes about excessive or unauthorized charges, and inadequate services were the main concerns expressed in the 2016 telecommunications complaints. Understanding your service contract is the key to minimizing potential issues, and open communication with the service provider is the best way to resolve disputes. Learn about your consumer rights under the law by reviewing our [telecommunications fact sheets](#) at datcp.wi.gov.

Some general tips to protect you with telecommunications issues:

**Watch your billing statements:** Review each monthly bill to ensure that there have not been any changes in pricing or options. Also, look to see that there have not been any unexpected third-party services added – this illegal practice is known as “cramming” or “packing.”

**Track your promotions:** When you sign up for a service plan with promotional options or pricing, keep track of the date the promotion ends so you are not blindsided by a price increase or dropped features or channels. Providers are required to spell out the complete terms of any promotions in your enrollment documentation and must abide by their policies.

**Service changes:** If a provider is going to increase the price or changes the terms of a subscription, they must give the customer written notice describing the changes and the effective date. This notice must be given 25-90 days in advance of the change, and customers should be informed of their right to cancel without penalty.

A provider may give notice of a service change as part of the regular billing statement, so read through all material included in your monthly bill to avoid missing an important notice.

**Service disruptions:** If you face a service disruption, contact the business immediately and find out who is responsible for paying for a service call if one is necessary.

You may be entitled to a credit for service disruptions, though there may be restrictions based on the length of the interruption and who is responsible for the issue. You will not receive these credits if you do not notify the provider of the interruption and request the credit.

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**Keep documentation:** It is always important to keep copies of your contracts, subscription terms and correspondence. If a dispute arises this information is very important to reaching a resolution.

For additional information, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to [datcphotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcphotline@wisconsin.gov) or call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128.

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