

Friday, 15 February 2008

RANKINE REVEALS TOP 5 CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

It's been revealed that as the weather warms up, so too do complaints about air-conditioners. Statistics released this week from the Annual report of the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) showed that South Australians complaining about air-conditioning supplies doubled last financial year.

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Jennifer Rankine, released the top 5 formal complaints registered by OCBA.

"More than 4500 written complaints were registered with consumer affairs last financial year. The highest number of complaints related to general consumer products including air conditioners, clothes, electrical items and furniture," Ms Rankine said

Air conditioning complaints increased by 100% compared with the previous year. Other complaints included furnishing (increase of 35%), television, video recorders and DVD's (increase of 29%).

"It's pleasing to see the number of complaints about scams and schemes has fallen significantly, indicating South Australians are becoming increasingly vigilant and savvy about detecting fraudulent letters, emails and other material," Ms Rankine said.

The top 5 complaints registered with the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs were:

<u>Category</u>	<u>2006-07</u>	<u>2005-06</u>
General consumer products <i>(Includes clothes, furniture, electrical, books, jewellery)</i>	945	910
Scams and schemes	894	1364
Residential building and construction	673	859
General services <i>(Includes gym membership, dry-cleaning, furniture removalists, training providers)</i>	420	537
Motor vehicles and transport products	374	400

The 2006-07 Annual Report showed nearly 93 000 people (a decline of 7%) contacted the office to query their consumer rights. Many of these enquiries were resolved through agency advice and information, but some required consumer affairs staff to negotiate with traders. More than 4500 of the total number of enquiries escalated into formal complaints.

There was a 13% decline in the number of formal complaints registered, which Ms Rankine said is encouraging.

“People seem to be increasingly aware of their rights and, with the assistance of consumer affairs, appear to be making more informed decisions resolving issues with traders amicably.”

“Of all the complaints received, common concerns were products and services not meeting customer expectations, and traders not fulfilling all of their contractual and warranty obligations.

If people do not get what they have ordered, then they should assert their rights and ask the trader to resolve the matter,” Ms Rankine said.

The Annual Report also revealed the range of activities and approaches OCBA used during the year to ensure compliance in the market place.

OCBA prepared briefs for prosecution or disciplinary action on 57 cases and facilitated 25 successful legal proceedings with outcomes including:

- 17 convictions
- Fines of various amounts, totalling \$84,250
- Licence disqualifications
- Prohibitions from working in particular roles or industries.

“Court action sends a strong message to the community and to key industry groups that breaches of legislation are taken very seriously, and works to deter others who may be acting unlawfully or unethically.

“It’s encouraging that OCBA is taking steps to protect both South Australian consumers and traders in the market place which works towards ensuring ours is a reputable State in which to live and do business in,” Ms Rankine said.

For consumer advice about your rights and responsibilities contact OCBA on 8204 9777 or country callers 131 882 or visit www.ocba.sa.gov.au.