



Consumer Affairs Tabloid



Keeping you in the "KNOW"

287- CITY

Army Community Service Financial Readiness Branch

September 2009



Excerpt from: GSA Federal Citizen Information Center
Consumer Action Handbook www.consumeraction.gov

General Buying Tips - Before You Buy

To avoid problems and make better decisions, use this checklist BEFORE you make a purchase.

- Make sure that the seller has all appropriate licenses. Doctors, lawyers, home improvement contractors and many other service providers must register with a state or local licensing agency.
- Check out a company's complaint record with your local consumer affairs office and Better Business Bureau.
- Get a written copy of guarantees and warranties. Compare their features.
- Get the seller's refund, return and cancellation policies.
- Ask who to contact if you have a question or problem.
- Read and understand any contract or legal document you are asked to sign. Make sure there are no blank spaces. Insist that any extras you are promised be put in writing.
- Consider paying by credit card. If you have a problem, you can dispute a charge made on your credit card.

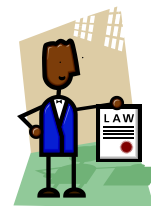
General Buying Tips - After You Buy

Even careful buyers can run into unforeseen problems later on. To minimize them, follow these steps after you buy:

- Save all papers that you get with your purchase. Keep all contracts, sales receipts, canceled checks, owner's manuals and warranty documents.
- Read and follow product and service instructions. The way you use or take care of a product will affect your warranty rights.

Excerpt from: The Better Business Bureau

Top Consumer Myths!



Consumers lose thousands of dollars each year due to common misperceptions. The Better Business Bureau wants you to know the facts. Here are some popular assumptions:

MYTH: You have the right to cancel any purchase within three days.

FACT: Contrary to popular belief, the three-day Cooling-off Rule (right to cancel) applies to only a limited number of cash or credit transactions of \$25 or more. The Rule applies to door-to-door sales or other places other than at the company's regular place of business. Purchases of automobiles and other vehicles are **not** usually covered.

MYTH: You have the right to a store refund if you request one.

FACT: Unless the product is defective or was misrepresented, a refund or exchange is a privilege and not a right that you can demand. Ask about the merchant's policy before you purchase the product. In some states, refunds and exchanges are voluntarily provided by retail stores.



Excerpt from: County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer Affairs
<http://dca.lacounty.gov/tsCosigningAContract.htm>

Signing a Contract

Before you sign a contract, do the following:

1. Understand the contract

You have the right to understand a contract before you are asked to sign it. If there is something you don't understand, ask for an explanation. If you have doubts about a purchase, go home and think it over. Don't be pressured into signing before you are ready. Statements that you must purchase today to get a good deal may not be true.

2. Never sign a contract with blank spaces

Cross out any blank spaces and any statements that do not apply to your purchase.

3. Get all promises in writing

If the seller has promised you something, make sure that it is written on the contract. If the seller won't put it in writing, don't sign. Promises a salesperson makes should be written on the contract.

4. Make changes on the contract before signing

If you want to add or delete something to the contract, do it before you sign.

5. Get an exact copy

Get an exact copy of the contract when you sign it. Don't let them tell you that a copy will be mailed to you later.



From the Files of Fort Hood's Consumer Affairs Office

Barracks lawyer: Someone who gives advice based on the rumor mill. This information has not been verified and may or may not be factual. Next time you forward 'facts' to your friends ask yourself the following questions: Is this person a lawyer; Can this information be verified with a reliable government, state, or consumer agency; and Do I understand the context in how it applies?

Common misconception with the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) is that individuals mistakenly believe it allows them to break any type of contract when they deploy and that all lenders must reduce their interest rates to 6%. You can break a lease of a car or a lease of an apartment when you deploy providing you didn't sign a waiver on a separate sheet of paper which states you are waiving your rights. The SCRA allows you to have your interest rates lowered on debts you incurred before entering active duty providing you meet certain criteria. This does not apply for deployments. Some lenders voluntarily allow you to terminate or suspend contracts and lower interest rates during deployments. See www.servicemembers.gov/scratext.htm for an in-depth version of the law.

When signing up for a service such as cable, satellite TV, home security alarms, etc., ask the salesperson to show you in writing the clause that allows you to terminate the contract and under what conditions.

The military community is made up of individuals from various states and countries which can lead to inaccurate information being passed along as facts. There are federal, state, and city laws. The laws or consumer protections you have back home may not apply to where you currently reside. You can check with your state attorney's consumer protection (affairs) branch online to find out what rights you may or may not have. In Texas you can go to www.oag.state.tx.us/consumer/index.shtml.

Back issues of the Consumer Affairs Tabloid are available on the Financial Readiness section of the ACS website at www.hoodmwr.com/acs.

Have questions? Email: melody.squires@us.army.mil or call 287-CITY (2489)