

(Sample Newspaper Article)

(Submit this article to your local newspaper editor as an opinion piece from your organization's leadership to be used during National Consumer Protection Week. Also, consider running this article in your organization's newsletter.)



National Consumer Protection Week

ARMCHAIR ARMOR: SHOPPING SAFELY FROM HOME

Helping consumers know their rights when they shop from the comfort of home is the goal of the second annual National Consumer Protection Week, which kicks off February 14.

Shopping from home is convenient and offers a wide range of choices to time-strapped consumers. But, consumer protection officials say, at-home shopping is not without risk. Whether consumers are ordering products or services from a telemarketer, a direct-mail advertiser, a television shopping network, an Internet-based company or a door-to-door salesperson, they need to know their rights, understand the risks and know where to call for recourse if something goes wrong with the purchase. Here are a few tips to help making shopping from home safer:

- ✓ Know who you're dealing with. Shop from vendors you know to be legitimate. There's no fail-safe way to check up on an unfamiliar seller, but you might be able to get information from friends, your local consumer protection agency, the state Attorney General's office or the Better Business Bureau.
- ✓ Protect your privacy. Provide personal information only if you know who's collecting it, why, and how it's going to be used.
- ✓ Think it through. Don't act on impulse or buckle under to high-pressure tactics.
- ✓ Know what you're buying. Get a complete description of all terms of the transaction, including shipping and handling costs and return policies if you're not satisfied.
- ✓ Pay the safest way. A credit card offers the most consumer protections, including a \$50 liability limit for unauthorized charges.
- ✓ Seek help if you run into a problem. If you can't resolve your problem by working directly with the company, contact the state Attorney General's office, the Better Business Bureau or the Federal Trade Commission's toll-free helpline at 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357).

To report mail fraud, call the local U.S. Postal Inspection Service or postmaster. If you suspect telemarketing or Internet fraud, report it to the National Fraud Information Center/Internet Fraud Watch programs. These programs, operated by the National Consumer League, can be reached toll-free by phone at 1-800-876-7060 or online at www.fraud.org.

For a list of corporate contacts, a sample complaint letter and contact information for consumer protection agencies nationwide, go to www.nacaa.net and click on the banner that asks, "Has a business treated you unfairly?" Another source of help is the National Elder Care Hotline at 1-800-677-1116 or at www.aoa.dhhs.gov.

Among the organizers of NCPW are the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Federation of America, AARP, the National Association of Consumer Agency Administrators, the National Consumers League and the National Association of Attorneys General.

For more information, visit the NCPW web site at www.consumer.gov.