***Government Agencies***

***Department of Agriculture (USDA*):** [**www.usda.gov**](http://www.usda.gov)

The USDA sets standards for, inspects, and grades meats, poultry, and canned fruits and vegetables. It also publishes many booklets and pamphlets on food, clothing, household

equipment, and other topics of interest to consumers.

***Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC):*** [***www.cpsc.gov***](http://www.cpsc.gov)

The CPSC protects the public against unreasonable risk from consumer products. It enforces the Federal Hazardous Substances Act and the Poison Prevention Packaging Act. In addition, it works closely with industry in developing safety standards for many household products.

***Federal Trade Commission (FTC):*** [***www.ftc.gov***](http://www.ftc.gov)

The FTC has law enforcement responsibilities in advertising and marketing. In these fields, it works to prevent deceptive practices. It is also a guardian of consumer rights in credit transactions and enforces a number of laws related to labeling (of clothing, appliances, and other consumer products).

***Food and Drug Administration (FDA):*** [***www.fda.go***](http://www.fda.go)***v***

The FDA enforces laws and regulations on the purity, quality, and labeling of food, drugs, and cosmetics. It certifies new drugs and inspects drug and food-processing plants. It also regulates the advertising and sale of medical devices such as hearing aids and pacemakers.

***Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC):*** [***www.sec.gov***](http://www.sec.gov)

The SEC registers and supervises the issue and sale of stocks and bonds. It is responsible for preventing fraud in the sale of securities to the public through interstate commerce. It requires public disclosure of facts in the sale of securities so that investors can make realistic judgments.

***CDC – Center for Disease Control*** [***www.cdc.gov***](http://www.cdc.gov)

The CDC is responsible for protecting the public from unreasonable risk of disease. As part of the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC attempts to prevent and control infectious diseases, injuries, workplace hazards, disabilities, and environmental health threats. The CDC also maintains health and disease statistics and responds to health emergencies. They guard against disease outbreaks, including bioterrorism, with personnel stationed in more than 25 countries.

**The Comptroller of the Currency** [**www.occ.gov**](http://www.occ.gov)

The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency is a part of the United States Department of the Treasury. The mission of the OCC is to ensure a safe, sound national banking system. It charters, regulates, and supervises nation banks.

**The Pennsylvania Attorney General** [**www.attorneygeneral.gov**](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov)

Every state has an attorney general whose responsibility is to protect the citizens from consumer fraud, unscrupulous business practices, and enforce consumer protection laws. The Attorney General’s office can investigate and mediate consumer complaints. Unlike the Better Business Bureau (which is a voluntary, informal organization made up of local business people trying to promote their businesses) the Attorney General has the power to take legal action against companies that have cheated consumers. The attorney generals from numerous states prosecuted the cases against the cigarette companies who lied about the content and effect of their product then forces those companies to pay restitution.

If you don’t know which agency can help you, call the Pennsylvania Attorney General.

***Consumer Protection***

***Consumer Protection Statutes***:

-Federal laws that are passed to protect consumers are called statutes.

-Government agencies were established to enforce consumer protection statutes.

-Agencies also exist at the state, local, and county level.

***Consumer Credit Protection Act:***

This law requires truth in lending. Consumers must be told exactly what the credit charge is on a purchase or loan. Creditors must report these charges in a uniform way. Credit costs must be stated both in dollars and cents and as an annual percentage rate.

***Fair Packaging and Labeling Act:***

This statue requires truth in packaging. It is designed to help consumers compare goods. The act requires that certain facts be printed clearly on packaging. These facts include net contents, size of serving, list of ingredients in order of decreasing weight, and the like.

***Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act:***

This law is designed to assure consumers of the safety, purity, and wholesomeness of food products. It also covers the safety and effectiveness of drugs and cosmetics. The act requires that these products be informatively labeled.

***Automobile Information Disclosure Act:***

This act helps consumers compare new automobiles. It requires that manufacturers label each car, listing its suggested retail price, the price of any extras, and the total price.

***Child Protection and Toy Safety Act:***

The purpose of this act is to protect children from dangerous goods, including toys. The act bans the shipment and sale of such dangerous items from state to state.

**Federal Hazardous Substances Labeling Act**

This act requires warning labels on all items containing dangerous chemicals. This includes any product that may cause substantial personal injury or substantial illness during or as a result of any handling, use, or ingestion.

**Textile Fiber Products Identification Act**

Prohibits false labeling and advertising of all textile products. The specific information relating to the fiber content on labels must be attached and easily seen by the consumer at the time of sale. Think of labels on pillows, mattresses, etc.

**Magnuson-Moss Federal Warranty Law**

This law provides rules governing the content of warranties. It requires manufacturers and sellers of consumer products to provide consumers with detailed information about warranty coverage. Notice the warranty on the next product you buy.

**Equal Credit Opportunity Act**

The act prohibits discrimination in the extending of credit based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, receipt of public assistance or because you exercise your rights under federal laws. It does not guarantee credit. You must still pass the creditor’s tests of creditworthiness. They use your credit report so it is your responsibility to make sure it is correct.

**Truth-in-Savings Act**

All depository institutions are required to report interest earnings in the same way using the Annual Percentage Yield (APY).

**Each Consumer Right has a matching Consumer Responsibility**

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| --- | --- |
| **Consumer Rights** | **Consumer Responsibilities** |
| **Right to Safety**  Consumers should be protected against goods that are hazardous to health or life. | **Responsibility to use products safely**  Consumers should use products as they were meant to be used and follow recommended procedures for care and maintenance. |
| **Right to be Informed**  Consumers should be protected against fraudulent or misleading advertising, labeling, or sales practices They should be given the facts needed to make informed choices | **Responsibility to use information**.  Consumers should look for information about products they plan to buy and use to compare and evaluate different brands and models. |
| **Right to Choose** **Carefully**  Consumers should be assured access to a variety of goods and services at competitive prices. | **Responsibility to Choose Carefully**  Consumers should use their buying power intelligently to encourage ethical business practices and safe, reliable products. Boycott (do not buy) products you know are unsafe or unethical. |
| **Right to be Heard**  Consumers should be assured that their interests will be considered in the making of laws. | **Responsibility to speak up**  Consumers should keep themselves informed on consumer issues and let public officials know their opinions. |
| **Right to Redress**  Consumers are entitled to swift and fair remedies for consumer problems. | **Responsibility to seek redress**.  Consumers should let businesses know when their products and services do not measure up to expectations. They should pursue legal and other available remedies when problems arise. |

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***Consumer Myths***

**The Better Business Bureau wants you to know the facts. Here are some common 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 transaction of $25 or more. The Rule applies to door-to-door sales or places other than at the company’s regular place of business. Purchases of automobiles and other vehicles are not usually covered.

**Myth**: You have a 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. Save all receipts.

**Myth**: You are guaranteed to win a fabulous prize when you receive an “Awards Notification” in the mail.

**Fact**: Phony prize or sweepstakes promotions cost consumers millions of dollars each year. If the prize promoter demands that you pay up-front to cover entry or judging fees, as a donation. When the offer requires you to pre-pay taxes, or respond via a call to a 900 number, do not respond! Call your Better Business Bureau or the Attorney General in your state.

**Myth**: Almost all the money contributed to charity must go to the intended purpose.

**Fact**: Charitable organizations are not obligated to spend a minimum percentage of what they raise on their stated charitable purposed. Donors should ask if the caller is a paid solicitor or a volunteer for the charity, and request written materials stating what percentage of the donation would actually go to the organization’s program.

**Myth**: It is okay to give out your credit card number over the phone even when you are not making a purchase.

**Fact**: Never use your credit card for identification purposes in response to a phone solicitor. Con artists with access to your credit card number and expiration date may make unauthorized charges against your card. Do use your credit card to purchase merchandise from an established business, as it offers protection if you have difficulty receiving your product or service.

**Myth**: Purchasing magazines will improve your chances of winning a publisher sweepstakes.

**Fact**: Entrants who do not purchase magazines must be given the same chance of winning as those who do make purchases. It is illegal in most states for any type of sweepstakes promotion to require any kind of purchase or payment to enter.

**Myth:** No one can take money directly from your bank account without your written authorization.

**Fact:** Giving someone your checking account number may provide him or her with the means to make withdrawals from your account. Unscrupulous individuals can sometimes contact your bank with your account number, claim that you authorized a withdrawal, and convince the bank to make the payment even though it lacks your signature.

<http://www.bbb.org/library/myths.asp>