

Consumer Protection

This weekly column is prepared by the Consumer Protection Service of the Alaska Attorney General's Office with the objective of helping prevent, through public information, unfair and deceptive acts and practices in trade and commerce

It is presented in the interests both of Alaskan consumers and the honest and reputable businesses serving them — which are, of course, the vast majority.

The column offers explanations of the obligations of consumers and businesses under state and federal laws, as well as guidelines for consumer transactions.

Reader comments and observations, as well as consumer complaints, may be mailed to the Consumer Protection Service, Office of the Attorney General, in Juneau, Fairbanks and Anchorage. The addresses are Pouch K, Juneau, Alaska 99801; 360 K Street, Anchorage, Alaska 99501; and P.O. Box 1309, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

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GIFTS IN THE MAIL. Ever wonder what to do with items which come to you unordered in the mail? It is illegal for anyone to offer merchandise for sale by sending goods which you have not requested, unless it is clearly marked as a gift.

You can consider such merchandise a gift. You can use or dispose of it in any manner you see fit without any obligation to the sender.

USING SMALL CLAIMS COURT. In some cases, a dispute over a purchase cannot be resolved in the Consumer Protection Section itself. This can be the case when the dispute does not involve a matter of unfair or deceptive trade practices, but is simply a disagreement between consumer and merchant.

If a claim does not involve more than \$1,000, it can be handled in small claims court.

Use of small claims court does not require any knowledge of legal theories. You present your facts to the court and the court applies the law.

The clerks and judges of the court will assist you. They will explain the procedures involved and make it as simple as possible for you to get your case heard.

You won't need an attorney, and the cost is very small. If you are successful in court, you will get these costs back.

OLD? NEW? If you discover that goods which were sold to you as original or new actually are used, reconditioned or seconds, contact this office. Such misrepresentations are prohibited by Alaskan law.