

AG announces top 10 consumer complaints for 2006

by Bend Weekly News Sources

AG announces annual consumer complaint list as part of the observance of National Consumer Protection Week; 2006 consumer complaint list similar to 2005 top 10; gas price reporter is the exception

This week Attorney General Hardy Myers announced the Oregon Department of Justice 2006 Top 10 Consumer Complaint list and reported on the importance of several consumer law proposals currently being considered by the 2007 Oregon Legislature. The announcements are part of the week's events being held throughout the United States in celebration of National Consumer Protection Week.

"Consumer statistics from the Oregon Department of Justice complaint data base give us a pretty clear picture of what really bothered Oregonians in the past year but oftentimes, those categories just under the Top 10 cutoff are of equal importance," Myers said. "As we announce the Top 10 list, we also want to emphasize a few of those that didn't make the cut and four proposed bills that would give us jurisdiction in areas causing problems for consumers."

Oregon's 2006 Top 10 Consumer Complaint List includes: #1 Telecommunications 1,025 Cellular 251 Cable and Satellite 225 Internet Service Provider 180 Long Distance 159 Local Service 53 #2 Financial Institutions 761 Credit Cards 286 Real Estate Financing 89 Sales Financing 78 Mortgage Brokers 78 Commercial Banking 76 Consumer Lending 26 Credit Unions 13 #3 Motor Vehicle Sales 700 New Car Dealers 342 Selling new cars 188 Selling used cars 149 Leasing 5 Used Car Dealers 290 RV, Trailer, Campers 33 Motorcycles 14 #4 Collection Agencies 483 #5 Internet Retailers 469 #6 Sweepstakes/Prize Promos/Foreign Lotteries 466 #7 Health Care 432 Home Health Care 130 Physicians 38 Pharmacies / Drug Stores 37 Dentists 27 Medical Discount Cards 25 #8 Gasoline Prices 295 #9 Internet Auctions 288 #10 Construction Contractors 273

On the 2006 Top 10 Consumer Complaint List, last year's number one and number two changed places with Telecommunications going to the top with an additional 159 complaints over last year's 866 and Financial

Institutions dropping from 949 to 761 for the number two slot. Internet Auctions fell from number three to number nine moving Motor Vehicle Sales from number four at 571 complaints to number three at 700 complaints.

Collection Agencies continued its climb from number 10 in 2001 to number four in 2006. Although collection agencies must register with a state regulatory agency, the Department of Justice has proposed SB120, which will give the Attorney General jurisdiction to enforce Oregon's Unlawful Debt Collection Practices law.

Internet Retailers rose from number six in 2005 to number five in 2006 and Sweepstakes/Prize Promotions/Foreign Lotteries jumped from number seven to number six. Complaints against home Health Care companies added 130 to the Health Care category moving it from number eight to number seven.

Construction Contractors dropped one spot to number 10 and the Nigerian Money Schemes dropped off the Top 10. First timer Gasoline Prices appeared at number eight.

Most of the Gasoline Price complaints were reported directly to the Attorney General's online Gas Price Reporter. Complaints are monitored weekly to spot possible gas price problems in the industry. Of the 295 reports from Oregon residents, investigators found three required the companies to be warned of possible violations of state law. Oregonians may report possible unlawful conduct in gasoline pricing and advertising on the Attorney General's Gas Price Reporter at www.doj.state.or.us.

The next five industries that did not make the Top 10 List are no strangers to the Department of Justice. Auto repair dropped off the list in 2005 but still generated 229 complaints in 2006. Other categories being watched by Financial Fraud/Consumer Protection include real estate related complaints, 153; travel related, 136; health club, 131; and insurance related complaints at 124.

Three other important consumer protection bills have been proposed and are currently working their way through the legislative process. SB118, price gouging in an emergency, is in its second decade of being proposed by the Department of Justice. SB116, primarily a disclosure bill, concerns towing companies and certain predatory practices. It has been introduced and is being carefully examined by a working group led by the Department of Justice.

Oregon's No Call program, which was effectively pre-empted by the federal government in 2003 when the National Do Not Call Registry was created, could be back in action if SB117 is made into law. The proposed amendment would allow the Oregon Attorney General to prosecute violators of the National Do Not Call Registry under the state statute with civil penalties of up to \$25,000 per violation. The federal registry would provide Oregonians with coverage under both state and federal statutes, free of charge to consumers.

Last year, Oregonians filed more than 15,000 complaints with the Federal Trade Commission regarding unwanted telemarketing calls to both their landline and cell phone numbers. This was 6,000 more complaints than filed in 2005..

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