

eFLORIDA CONSUMER NEWSLETTER

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435-7352

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A Look Back at 2017...

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, information and protection. The Division of Consumer Services processed more than 37,000 consumer complaints in 2017.

Problems with petroleum products, specifically gasoline, remained a top issue for Florida consumers in 2017. The division processed 1,555 complaints regarding petroleum products, with most of those complaints focused on the quality or quantity of gasoline dispensed at the nearly 9,000 gas stations across the state.

Unsolicited telephone calls, including robocalls and telemarketing calls, continued to top the list of consumer complaints with over 19,000 complaints filed in 2017. The Federal Communications Commission adopted new rules in November 2017 that allow voice service providers to proactively block certain types of robocalls that are likely to be fraudulent because they come from certain types of phone numbers, including those that do not or cannot make outgoing calls.

The top five complaints filed with FDACS in 2017 against entities regulated by the department include the following:

1. Unsolicited telephone calls: Florida's Do Not Call law makes it unlawful for telemarketers to make telephone sales calls before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. local time, not provide you with their name and telephone number, use auto dialers with prerecorded messages, or call a number on the Do Not Call List.
2. Petroleum: FDACS inspects retail gas stations across Florida, making sure that fuel dispensers are working safely and properly. We investigate fraud complaints to protect consumers and ensure they get their money's worth at the gas pump.
3. Motor Vehicle Repair: The Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act requires anyone who is paid to repair motor vehicles owned by other individuals to register with FDACS. Repair work must be authorized by the consumer.
4. Travel: The sellers of travel law requires any person or business that is a seller or promoter of travel-related services to register annually with FDACS, unless exempt. Sellers of travel are required to provide a performance bond, in an amount not to exceed \$25,000, or \$50,000 if they sell vacation certificates.
5. Moving and Storage: Intrastate movers are required to register with FDACS, regardless of any other local, municipal or county licensing requirements. Consumers who are not satisfied should make the mover aware of their claim, in writing, as quickly as possible. If the company does not handle the claim satisfactorily, consumers may file a complaint with FDACS.

Do you have a complaint about a business? FDACS can help, regardless of whether we regulate the specific industry. Visit FloridaConsumerHelp.com to file a consumer complaint online or call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) to talk with a consumer assistance representative.



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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

W-2 Forms Signal the Start of Tax Season

The W-2 Wage and Tax Statement signals the opening of tax season and is the form most people care about when preparing to file their federal taxes. Federal law requires all employers to send employees W-2 statements no matter how low earnings or wages are. These forms can be sent in either paper or digital form no later than January 31 for the purpose of reporting the previous year's wages. They are considered on time if they are properly addressed and mailed on or before January 31.

Identity theft is a real concern when filing taxes. Taxpayers who file via mobile, tablets and apps using shared wireless networks are at greater risk of having their tax identity compromised. Protecting personal information and Social Security numbers year-round is the most important step in safeguarding an individual's identity. Aside from that, filing a tax return as early as possible is the next best thing a taxpayer can do to prevent tax-related identity theft.

The Internal Revenue Service does not verify the validity of individual tax forms. The agency only becomes aware of issues when two returns are filed using the same Social Security number. If an identity thief has the right information, they can file a fraudulent tax return as early as January 20th and beat a legitimate taxpayer to their refund.

The [Federal Trade Commission](#) recommends the following steps to help prevent tax-related identity theft:

- Use a secure Internet connection if you file electronically, or mail your tax return directly from the post office.
- Shred copies of your tax return, drafts or calculation sheets you no longer need.
- Respond to all mail from the IRS as soon as possible.
- Don't give out your Social Security number unless necessary.
- Research a tax preparer thoroughly before you hand over personal information.
- Check your credit report at least once a year for free to make sure no other accounts have been opened in your name.

Call 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) to talk with a consumer assistance representative if you need more information.

National Shop for Travel Day

The second Tuesday in January is National Shop for Travel Day. The Travel Technology Association founded National Shop for Travel Day to celebrate the joy of travel and highlight the technology that has transformed the way consumers shop, compare, plan and book their vacations.

With the holidays in the rear view, many consumers are already looking ahead to their next opportunity for a vacation. FDACS regulates sellers of travel and most are required to register and post a bond that can be used to provide refunds. Even with all the tech tools and resources available to help consumers easily shop for that perfect trip, there are some timeless tips consumers should follow when making their 2018 travel plans.

- Before contracting with a travel business, visit FloridaConsumerHelp.com or call FDACS at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) to determine whether it is registered and if there are any complaints against it.
 - Beware of high-pressure sales tactics and pitches that require immediate payment. Do not make hasty decisions.
 - Obtain all information and details in writing.
 - Know and understand the business' (cruise line, airline, hotel, etc.) cancellation policy before making your purchase. Some may be non-refundable or have penalties for rescheduling.
 - Remember that vacation certificates can be canceled within 30 days from the date of purchase or when accommodations or facilities are not available when requested for use as provided in the contract.
 - Always follow the terms and conditions provided by the business when requesting a refund.
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The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection, and information. Consumers who believe fraud has taken place can contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or, for Spanish speakers, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) or visit us online at FloridaConsumerHelp.com.