



# The Informed Consumer

e-Newsletter of the Consumer Affairs Branch of the  
Fairfax County  
Department of Cable Communications & Consumer Protection

Winter 2009

Volume 1, Number 2

## Visit Consumer Affairs Online for all of your consumer needs:

- Visit Consumer Central
- File a Complaint Online
- Search the Complaint Database
- View the Tenant-Landlord Handbook
- Find out about the Consumer Protection Commission (CPC)
- Find out about the Tenant-Landlord Commission
- Property Owners' and Condominium Association Resources
- Tune in to Your, Community Your Call
- Tune in to Consumer Focus

## National Consumer Protection Week: March 1-7, 2009



The Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Branch has joined a group of federal, state, and local government agencies and national consumer organizations to launch the 11<sup>th</sup> annual National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW), March 1-7, entitled NCPW 2009 – *Nuts and Bolts: Tools for Today's Economy*. The annual event highlights consumer education efforts across the country.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, scam artists and fraudsters follow the headlines, and are likely to use the economic downturn to take advantage of consumers who may be underwater financially. The NCPW website has tools people can use to recognize a rip-off, sniff out a scam, and make smart choices for today's market.

Consumer Affairs is hosting seminars and setting up information booths throughout the week. Look for Information booths at the Fairfax County Government Center, South County Government Center, and at Northern Virginia Community College's Annandale Campus.

If you would like to request more information, or sign up for a free seminar, please contact us by phone at 703-222-8435 or send an email [wwwcpd@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:wwwcpd@fairfaxcounty.gov).

**National Consumer Protection Week  
highlights consumer protection  
and education efforts across the country.**

[www.consumer.gov/ncpw](http://www.consumer.gov/ncpw)

See schedule of events on page 2.

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**Monday, March 2, 2009**

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b> Investigators will be available to talk with consumers and provide tools and information to make wise purchasing decisions	Fairfax County Government Center North Atrium Suite 127
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**Tuesday, March 3, 2009**

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b>	Fairfax County Government Center North Atrium Suite 127
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	<b>Tools to Stop or Avoid Foreclosure</b> After a panel discussion, homeowners can set up an appointment to meet with a certified foreclosure prevention specialist.	Fairfax County Government Center Conference Rooms 4 & 5
10:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.	<b>Consumer Focus: Tools to Avoid Debt Traps</b>	Fairfax County Government Channel 16

**Wednesday, March 4, 2009**

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b>	Northern Virginia Community College Annandale Campus
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b>	Fairfax County Government Center North Atrium Suite 127
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b>	South County Government Center Access Fairfax, Suite 125
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	<b>Home Improvement Seminar: Tips on Selecting a Contractor</b> Learn about the tools you need to choose a contractor for emergency repair, routine maintenance, or remodeling.	South County Government Center Conference Rooms 221A & 221B
6:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.	<b>Consumer Focus: Tools to Avoid Debt Traps</b>	Fairfax County Government Channel 16

**Thursday, March 5, 2009**

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b>	Fairfax County Government Center North Atrium Suite 127
3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	<b>Consumer Focus: Tools to Avoid Debt Traps</b>	Fairfax County Government Channel 16

**Friday, March 6, 2009**

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.	<b>Tools and Resource Booth</b>	Fairfax County Government Center North Atrium Suite 127
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	<b>Tools to Avoid Debt Traps</b> Find out about payday loans, car title loans, and tax refund anticipation loans. Get the tools you need to evaluate if quick cash and high fees are really your best option.	Fairfax County Government Center Conference Rooms 4 & 5

## Case of the Quarter: Home Improvement

A consumer contacted the Consumer Affairs Branch in July 2008, claiming that the contractor who paved her driveway performed faulty work. Specifically, several areas of the driveway that the contractor installed were holding water. The contractor returned to attempt to repair the areas in question, but ended up making matters worse. The consumer attempted to contact the contractor about returning to her home to address the faulty repair work, but the contractor failed to respond to her.

The Consumer Affairs office and an inspector from the Department of Public Works (Maintenance and Stormwater and Management Division) met with the contractor at the consumer's home. As a result of the consultation, the contractor agreed to excavate and repair the 900 foot existing portion of the consumer's driveway. In addition, the contractor agreed to seal the entire driveway at no cost. The consumer was very satisfied with the outcome and very thankful for Consumer Affairs' assistance in the matter.

### Consumer Resources

#### Federal Trade Commission

*Federal government website dedicated to consumer issues with helpful topics.*

#### US Postal Inspection Service

*Provides information related to consumer fraud, identity theft, and scams.*

#### Check Code

*Unsure if the airline ticket you purchased online is genuine? Check the status on this website.*

#### Virginia Regulatory Town Hall

*Learn about proposed changes to Virginia's regulations, including a meetings calendar and board minutes.*

#### Virginia State Code

*Online access to the Virginia State Code.*

#### Fairfax County Ordinances

*Online access to the Fairfax County Ordinances.*

## Reaching out to Fairfax County's Youth

- ◇ Consumer Affairs has been actively involved in Fairfax County high school business classes throughout the school year. This year, Consumer Affairs estimates that they will make to presentations to over 50 high school classes and organizations. High school presentations include discussions about building credit, signing leases, the Virginia Consumer Protection Act, identity theft, and scam prevention – helping students understand the importance of being an informed consumer.
- ◇ Life Smarts –the ultimate consumer challenge–is an educational opportunity that develops consumer and marketplace knowledge. On March 7th, 2009, Consumer Affairs will travel to Richmond to judge the Life Smarts State Championship competition.
- ◇ Consumer Affairs also participates in Future Business Leaders of America. Investigators have presented the importance of ethical business practices at FBLA meetings across the county.
- ◇ Northern Virginia Community College will be hosting their annual Spring Fling on April 28th, 2009. For the second year in a row, Consumer Affairs has been invited to set up an information booth for students, providing students with information about Tenant-Landlord rights, credit scams, and identity theft.

## Ask The Investigator

Do you have a question that you would like to discuss with an Investigator? Consumer Affairs has an investigator on call each day of the week to handle your calls and emails. Last year Consumer Affairs provided assistance to over 4,800 advice inquiries.

Call for Advice: 703-222-8435 TTY 711 or  
submit a question via e-mail on our website.

Consumer Affairs also takes walk-ins for advice. If necessary, you may be asked by an Investigator to file a written complaint so that Consumer Affairs may assist you in resolving your dispute.

## Fairfax County Channel 16 Consumer Education

Consumer Affairs works collaboratively with Fairfax County Government Channel 16 to produce consumer education programs. These programs are featured on Channel 16 and are also available by Video on Demand and Live Video Streaming.

**Consumer Focus** shares vital information about current consumer issues. It provides timely advice to assist consumers in making informed buying decisions and in managing and protecting personal and financial resources.

**Your, Community, Your Call** is a lively discussion about homeowner and condominium association issues. It features guests from the community association industry and the Fairfax County Homeowners' and Condominium Association Liaison.

Department of Cable  
Communications  
and  
Consumer Protection

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Email Our Office

## The DTV Transition Date - June 12, 2009

The following changes have been announced regarding the DTV transition:

- ◇ The DTV Transition date has been delayed to June 12, 2009 (from February 17), after which time analog broadcast signals will cease.
- ◇ The new measure allows broadcasters to be able to drop analog broadcasts anytime after February 17, at their option, although most U.S. stations will continue their analog signals - along with simultaneous digital signals - through June 12<sup>th</sup>. No DC-area stations currently plan to drop analog signals before the June 12 deadline.
- ◇ The measure calls for a new rule to be issued within 30 days, which would allow persons with expired coupons to request them to be re-issued / replaced.
- ◇ The Economic Stimulus legislation signed by the President includes additional funding that will permit the issuance of additional \$40 coupons for digital-to-analog converter boxes as well as the replacement of \$40 coupons that have already expired or are unused.

Call the DTV Answer Line more information: 703-324-5900 or visit CPRD online:  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cable/](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cable/)

## Travel Tips—Don't let your dream vacation turn into a nightmare!

Have you made your Spring Break travel plans yet? Here are a few tips to keep in mind when planning your vacation:

- ◇ Never give your credit card number to an unfamiliar person or business which solicits you by phone, fax or email.
- ◇ Beware of firms that ask you to pay before confirming reservations. Reputable travel agents will confirm reservations before accepting payment.
- ◇ Beware of advance payment requirements until you receive information about restrictions, cancellation, and change penalties. If you are given insufficient details, request written information on total cost of the vacation and all items included. Any transportation, lodging, meals, or other items not specifically mentioned may not be included.

## Stop in to see us at South County

Don't have time to stop by our office at the Government Center? Fairfax County Consumer Affairs has a satellite office at the South County Government Building. Every Wednesday, you can stop in to see an Investigator from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Investigator will be available to discuss complaints, give advice regarding consumer transactions, and assist consumers in filing a complaint.

## The Office of the Common Interest Community Board

The Virginia Office of the Common Interest Community Board is available to assist the common interest community with the registration and reporting requirements of the new common interest community legislation. This office provides information about the activities of the Common Interest Community Board.

Please contact 804-367-8510 or email [cic@dpor.virginia.gov](mailto:cic@dpor.virginia.gov) for information about the following:

- ◇ Verification of your association's registration status
- ◇ Assistance with completing any of the required registration forms
- ◇ Clarification on the procedures for filing an annual report
- ◇ Information about the Common Interest Community Board Meetings
- ◇ Information about actions of the Common Interest Community Board

- ◇ Information about the regulatory process
- ◇ Verification of the licensure status of Common Interest Community Managers

You can also access regulations, registration information, applications and forms from the Office of the Common Interest Community Board website at [www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/cic\\_main.cfm](http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/cic_main.cfm)

## Emerald Ash Borer Information Sessions

The Fairfax County Forest Pest Branch is trying getting the word out to homeowners about the current status of the Emerald Ash Borer in Fairfax County.

Information sessions about the emerald ash borer are scheduled in areas of the county where infestations of this devastating insect have been found.

RSVP to the Forest Pest Branch, 703-324-5304.

Additional information can be found by visiting the county's website about the Emerald Ash Borer.

March 4, 7 p.m.  
Kingstowne Library

March 5, 7 p.m.  
Herndon Fortnightly  
Library

March 12, 7 p.m.  
Kingstowne Library

## Your Community, Your Call

Did you miss the January Your Community, Your Call Program—*Reasonable Rules, Reasonable Enforcement?* You can always view the most recent program on Mondays at 8:00 p.m. ET on Fairfax County Government Channel 16 or visit our website to view the Video on Demand.

Your Community, Your Call is designed to provide an interactive forum on topics specific to common interest community associations. Many of the topics that are chosen for the show are in response to questions received by Consumer Affairs. Let us know what topics are of interest to you.

Join us live on March 25, 2009 at 7p.m. for the next Your Community, Your Call — *Reactivating Dormant Associations.*

## Common Interest Community Association Email Subscriber List

The Consumer Affairs Branch maintains an email subscriber list for the common interest community. The list is used to communicate electronically about upcoming events that may be of interest to property owners and condominium owners.

You'll receive email notifications of the upcoming *Your Community, Your Call* program and other educational opportunities to enhance your effectiveness as an association member and leader.

To add your name to the subscriber list, please email [ycyc@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ycyc@fairfaxcounty.gov).