



# The Informed Consumer

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

Winter 2011

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## National Consumer Protection Week 2011 MARCH 6-12

### Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Gears Up for 13th Annual National Consumer Protection Week

Consumer Affairs (CA) is joining with federal, state, and local government agencies and national organizations to celebrate the 13th annual National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW) coming March 6-12, 2011. During NCPW, consumer education groups nationwide share tips and information that help consumers protect their privacy, manage money and debt, avoid identity theft, and avoid frauds and scams.

Consumer Affairs is your Information Destination, focusing on Consumer Rights & Responsibilities. Throughout the week, CA will host free seminars featuring accomplished industry leaders and attorneys. Representatives from the Virginia Department of Treasury and the Office of the Attorney General will be joining CA to exhibit information booths and offer additional resources. For more information or to register for an event, please email [consumer@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:consumer@fairfaxcounty.gov) or call us at 703-222-8435 TTY 711.

Visit Consumer Central for all of your online consumer needs:

- File a Complaint Online
- Tenant-Landlord Handbook
- Consumer Protection Commission (CPC)
- Tenant-Landlord Commission (TLC)
- Property Owners' and Condominium Association Resources
- Consumer Focus
- Your Community, Your Call

### National Consumer Protection Week Schedule of Events

Homeowners Association Open Forum	Monday, March 7	12:00-1:00 p.m.	Government Center Conference Room 4/5
How to be More Energy Efficient at Home	Tuesday, March 8	11:30-12:30 p.m.	Sherwood Regional Library
Automobile Rights and Responsibilities	Wednesday, March 9	1:00-2:00 p.m.	Government Center Conference Room 9/10
Getting the Best from Your Cable Company: Video, Voice & Data	Thursday, March 10	11:00-12:00 p.m.	Government Center Conference Room 9/10

Friday, March 11, 10:00 - 3:00 p.m., South County Center, 8350 Richmond Highway  
Consumer Information Booth with VA Department of Treasury Unclaimed Property Division

March 7 - 10, 11:30 - 1:30 p.m., North Atrium, Government Center

Consumer Information Booth: Investigators will be available to answer your questions.

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### 3 Scams to Avoid in an Online Job Search from Monster.com

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"If it looks too good to be true, it probably is." Whether you are searching for a new job online, keep in mind that the same technological innovations that help in your job search may be used by cyber-criminals looking to lure job seekers into questionable job "opportunities." Below are the most common scams you may see:

#### **Money-Laundering Scams**

Money launderers often create job descriptions that offer commissions or pay as high as \$2000 per day to process checks on behalf of foreign nationals. They are recruiting local citizens to "process payments" or "transfer funds," because as foreign nationals, they can't do it themselves.

#### **Reshipping Scams**

Reshipping, or postal forwarding, scams typically require job seekers to receive stolen goods in their own homes -- frequently consumer electronics -- and then forward the packages, often outside the United States. Those who fall for reshipping scams may be liable for shipping charges and even the cost of goods purchased online with stolen credit cards.

#### **Pre-pay/Work at Home Scams**

Although there are genuine jobs working at home, many "offers" are not valid forms of employment and may have the simple goal of obtaining an initial monetary investment from the victim. Using claims such as 'be your own boss' and 'make money quickly', Work at Home scams will not guarantee regular salaried employment and almost always require an "up-front" investment of money for products or instructions before explaining how the plan works.

#### **Protect Yourself**

What seems like a lucrative job offer could cost you your savings and more. Learn to identify the signals of an employment scam to protect yourself. When conducting a job search:

- ◆ Look for signals in a job posting or email offer, which could serve as an indicator that what is being presented as employment is not legitimate. Don't get involved with an employer that can't make its business model perfectly clear to you or one that's willing to hire you without even a phone interview. Do your own research on any employer that makes you feel at all uneasy.
- ◆ Never put your social security or national ID number, credit card number, bank account number or any type of sensitive personal identification data in your resume. You should never share any personal information with a prospective employer, even if they suggest that it is for a "routine background check", until you are confident that the employer and employment opportunity is legitimate.
- ◆ Do not engage in any transaction in which you are requested to transfer or exchange currency or funds to a prospective employer. Remain alert for the Work at Home employers who require you to make an up-front investment.
- ◆ Be cautious when dealing with individuals/companies from outside your own country.

If you think you have been a victim of fraud, immediately report the fraud to your local police. You can also file an online report with The Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C). You can also check out the consumer resources provided by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

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**Need Advice?****Ask an Investigator**

Investigators are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for walk-in assistance and advice. Call for Advice: (703) 222-8435 TTY: 711 or submit a question via e-mail on our website.

**File A Complaint**

When you call for advice, you may be asked by an Investigator to file a written complaint so that Consumer Affairs may assist you in resolving your dispute. You may file a complaint online or request that a complaint form be mailed to you.

**Search Complaint History**

Research the complaint history of a company prior to completing a transaction.

**Visit Us in South County**

An investigator is available each Monday and Thursday for advice at Access Fairfax in the South County Government Center.

8350 Richmond Highway,  
Suite 125  
Alexandria, VA 22309

**In the Spotlight:**

Consumer Focus: Bed Bugs

**Consumer Affairs Branch**

12000 Government Center  
Parkway, Suite 433  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
Phone: 703-222-8435 TTY: 711  
Fax: 703-324-3900

Visit Our Website

**Case of the Quarter: Television Warranty**

A consumer purchased a television from an electronics store and after a few months, the color images on the television began to fade. The consumer contacted a repair company who evaluated and repaired the television several times, but the it failed to work properly. The consumer contacted Consumer Affairs for help. Consumer Affairs facilitated a warranty exchange with the manufacturer of the television. The manufacturer replaced the unit with a brand new model and satisfied the consumer.

**Tips for Buying a Digital TV**

Before you buy, a few tips from the [Department of Cable and Consumer Services](#) can help you choose the quality you want and know what to watch for when shopping:

**720p vs. 1080p Picture Display Format** — Both are considered “high definition,” 1080p has better picture clarity and detail sharpness, and 720p sets are less expensive. If the packaging is labeled “high definition” without a specific format number or says “1366x768 resolution,” it is probably 720p. TVs with an “i” rather than “p” designation (such as “1080i”) have a lower quality display.

**60 Hz vs. 120 Hz** — Programs with fast-moving objects, such as sports, can appear jerky on a 60 Hz set. Motion is smoother at 120 Hz, particularly on a 32” or larger TV. If the TV packaging is unclear, the set is probably 60 Hz. Some high-end sets are 240 Hz and 480 Hz, but in most viewing situations the difference is not particularly noticeable.

**LCD vs. Plasma** — *LCDs* are good in rooms with several windows, as sunlight, glare, or reflections interfere with plasma displays. *Plasmas* have somewhat better contrast and color in rooms with little ambient light.

**Edge-Lit LED** — This feature, offered for LCDs, provides more brightness, notably to the four edges of the picture. It is not critical and can add to the price.

**3D** — Top-quality sets currently are expensive and there is limited 3D programming. Newer 3D sets likely will move up to 240 Hz. It might be advisable to wait for prices to go down and more 3D programming.

**Delivery and Setup** — For a larger TV, check if the store offers delivery, setup, and hooking up at least one component. Be sure to clarify what will be included. You may need a different cable box; check with your cable provider, particularly if you are replacing an analog set.

**Some Final Tips** —

- ◆ Ask if any new cables will be needed and how to connect them.
- ◆ Find out store policy on short-term returns and the store and manufacturer warranties provided.
- ◆ If you pay by credit card, some companies will double the manufacturer’s warranty length at no additional cost. Call the customer service number on the back of your card to see if this applies and the conditions. Keep the original sales receipt and a copy of the original manufacturer’s warranty, in case you ever have to make a claim through your credit card company.

**Further Questions? Cable TV Help Line: 703-324-5900**

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## Are You Engaged in the Legislative Process?

The 2011 Regular Session of the Virginia General Assembly convenes on Wednesday, January 12, 2011. Citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia can take an active role in the legislative process. The Virginia General Assembly website offers online resources to help the public become more engaged. The Legislative Information System allows tracking and review of legislation and committee agendas prior to meetings. To receive free email notifications about specific bills, sign up for the free Lobbyist-in-a-Box service, and track up to five bills without charge. Search for proposed bills specifically related to common interest communities, the Property Owners' Association Act, or the Condominium Act. The public is also offered the opportunity to testify before committees on issues of importance to their communities.

Do you know who the legislators are for your community? Who's My Legislator provides the ability to email Delegates and Senators and also provides contact information for representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, and U.S. Senate. Take a few moments to let elected officials know what concerns are impacting your community. Timing is key, so contact representatives about a particular issue before the legislature takes action on a proposed bill.

Community association leaders are encouraged to review proposed legislation with members of the board and the community. Have conversations about the potential impact of the legislation, and how the community can prepare to address any required change. Common interest communities have a voice. Hopefully this information will help to facilitate your voice being heard.

Each July, the Consumer Affairs Branch sponsors the *Your Community, Your Call – Legislative Review* a live, call-in television program to discuss the laws that have passed during the preceding General Assembly session. Join us to ask questions, and learn what actions your board can take to prepare for the changes to the law.

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## Your Community, Your Call

Tune to Fairfax County Government Channel 16 to view our most recent *Your Community, Your Call, Conflict of Interest* on Mondays at 8 p.m. You can also view the Video on Demand. Join us for our next *Your Community, Your Call—The Fair Housing Act* on January 27, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. Lella Amiss E. Pape, attorney with Rees Broome, PC, and Susan Rae Helander, senior community manager with Value Properties will join Michelle Thompson of the Consumer Affairs Branch to discuss the association board's responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act.

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## Who To Call? - Snow Removal

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is responsible for plowing the public roads (interstate, primary, secondary, residential) in Fairfax County. These public roadways can typically be identified by a route number sign posted at street intersections. Please contact VDOT's Northern Virginia District Office for additional information (**1-800-FOR ROAD (367-7623), TTY 711**). For answers to your snow removal questions, view the Snow Removal FAQs.

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## The Common Interest Community Board—Public Hearings Scheduled

The Common Interest Community Ombudsman Regulations, and the Common Interest Community Employee Certification Standards have been approved by the Governor's office, and will be published in the Virginia Register of Regulations on January 17, 2011. A public comment forum will be open on January 17, 2011 through March 18, 2011. On March 3, 2011, the Common Interest Community Board will hold public hearings for the purpose of receiving public comment on both of these regulations. For more information, and instructions on how to participate in this process, please visit the Virginia Regulatory Townhall website, or contact the Office of the Common Interest Community Board at 703-367-8500.

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