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Features Article

## Check for Back-Up Service

George and Melina, newly and happily married, just moved into their own flat in Samabula. The couple had so much to do – an enthusiastic Melina couldn't wait to decorate her lounge and kitchen. Her mum had gifted her some domestic electrical appliances but what she really needed was a fridge, a washing machine and a toaster. The two went ahead and purchased the three items – everything went well up until after a year of purchase.

The fridge door began dripping .

Having spent \$1,700 on the fridge and with a year's warranty, Melina was anxious to seek redress from the trader where she bought the fridge from – she wanted a replacement.

To her dismay, the trader refused a replacement, instead offered to repair the fridge. And that too with a cost. To this, Melina turned furious as she had a warranty.

Well, Melina and George received their 'repaired' fridge after a week – but, the fridge was still leaking. The leaking fridge was again taken for repairs. This happened thrice –Melina reached a boiling point, demanding a full refund or a brand new fridge from the trader.

The trader kept giving her a run around and the frustrated couple lodged a complaint with the Council. A positive outcome was reached after mediation and Melina finally received a new fridge of another brand.

It was unfortunate, that despite a warranty, Melina was given a run around by the trader simply because there was no proper back up service available for the item.

Like Melina, many other consumers end up buying electronic goods without double-checking for availability of spare parts and other back up service – all that catches their eyes is the zero-dollar deposit promotions and many still purchase items without doing research on the products.

The Consumer Watchdog continues to receive similar complaints. From January to February 2014, the Council received 35 complaints. The nature of complaints ranged from faulty, counterfeit brands and refurbished electrical items being sold with no spare parts or back up service; items malfunctioned within days of use; and no proper redress given to customers despite warranty.

Buying electronic goods like washing machines, dryer, freezer, radio and television is not same as buying a packet of biscuit – it is an expensive affair for many consumers as they have to plan and save for months before they make such purchases.

Therefore, the Council is reminding consumers to be responsible from their end by doing the following before purchasing electrical items:

**Council's tips:**

- **Checkout different brands** –Seek advice from others but be your own judge and look around for the variety of brands available locally and which one suits you best;
- **Ask about back-up services**- not all brands carry back up services in Fiji, therefore, it is important to find out whether the brand you are intending to buy has back up services available or not;
- Beware of any item that is much cheaper than you expected. If it's too good to be true, it probably is!
- Check whether the item come with instructions and a warranty?
- Check for any visible damage, especially loose or broken fittings or frayed wires. Get the item tested if possible.
- Use online review websites to find out what people are saying about products and sellers