



HEAD OFFICE

4 Carnavon Street
Private Mail Bag
GPO, Suva
Phone - General Office: 3300792, 3310183
Chief Executive Officer: 3305864
Fax: 3300115 | Email: complaints@consumersfiji.org

LAUTOKA/West

Suite 4 Popular Building
Vidilo Street
PO Box 5396, Lautoka
Phone: 6664987 | Fax: 6652846
Email: consumerlwk@connect.com.fj

LABASA/North

Level 1, Lot 41 Raza Properties Ltd
Nasekula Road
PO Box 64, Labasa
Phone: 8812559 | Fax: 8812559
Email: colbs@connect.com.fj

13 June 2015

Feature

Consumer Responsibility

When you spend your money buying goods or services, no doubt, you deserve the best 'value' for the money paid.

Unfortunately, there are times when what you have purchased from the marketplace is not of merchantable quality. For instance, in a complaint received by the Council, a consumer bought a tin fish, which after opening had some black object floating in it. In another case, a family purchased packets of milk to prepare a special dish for a prayer session. Unfortunately, the dish was all spoiled by the bad milk making it inedible.

The Council has over the years come across many such cases where consumers have ended up with products either contaminated or tampered.

Well, in such cases, consumers surely have the right to return any faulty goods and get all their money back (a full refund). In some cases, empowered consumers take the lead role in getting redress directly from traders and service providers but some consumers turn to the Council for help. When such complaints are lodged at the Council, we are obligated to act promptly with the aim to provide adequate redress.

Consumers are protected by the Sales of Goods Act Cap 230, which states that the goods purchased must fit the description, be of satisfactory quality and be fit for its purpose. This is irrespective of whether a consumer paid sale, discounted or normal price.

However, knowing your consumer rights and responsibilities is an important part of protecting yourself. The word "responsibility" is crucial when seeking redress. When things go wrong, don't expect someone else to lodge a complaint. Every consumer in such a situation must take initiative to lodge a complaint with the Council or other consumer protection authorities.

Making yourself heard when your consumer rights have been ignored or violated is vital in helping other consumers avoid a similar fate. It also forces businesses to act honestly and ethically and ultimately become more consumer-focused.

There cannot be dillydallying, especially, with complaints regarding perishable items (food and beverages). Consumers must take note that unless and until they provide the Council with the necessary documents and affected items, the Council will not be able to investigate those cases.

Without necessary documents, the Council cannot assist the consumers. Documents act as a *proof of purchase* needed to investigate the case.

The Council expresses concern over the attitude of some consumers who are complacent enough not to come forward and file their complaints.

In one recent case, a consumer called the Council complaining about liquid milk, which spoiled the dish they were preparing for a religious function. The consumer notified the Council by a phone call at around 4pm about the bad milk. Despite requests by the Council staff for the batch number on the milk packet, the consumer refused to assist. He wanted the Council staff to visit his home and pick the packets of bad milk. The consumer was not only rude but he harassed the staff by making several calls on the same issue. In a similar case, one consumer called the Council office with a complaint regarding weevils in a packet of flour. This particular consumer also wanted the Council to visit his residence to see the weevils.

The fact of the matter is that the Council neither has the resources needed to do home-visits nor does it have legal mandate to collect consumer complaints from homes. The responsibility to lodge written complaints with evidence lies with consumers. The Council accepts complaints through the following mode:

- Online (www.consumersfiji.org)
- Email using complaints@consumersfiji.org
- Face to face by visiting our three regional offices
- Letter

The Council reiterates that it will not accept complaints via phone, as every complaint which is filed with the Council is logged into its database for future references.

Tip

It is wise to keep any receipts, cancelled cheques, warranties, estimates, contracts and instructions that you exchange during purchases, to assist you to seek redress. Having the receipt or other written documentation confirms that you purchased the item from a specific trader.