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Consumer Council of Fiji



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13 December 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Traders Warned as Christmas Shopping Begins

With Christmas just around the corner, the Consumer Council of Fiji is urging traders to prioritize ethical business practices over quick profits. As consumers gear up for their holiday shopping sprees, the Council is intensifying its market surveillance to ensure compliance with relevant laws and ethical standards.

The Council's inspections during the early festive season have revealed several alarming issues that demand immediate attention. Among the most pressing concerns are traders failing to display price tags on items, creating confusion for consumers, while others are engaging in deceptive marketing tactics by advertising false discounts where "SPECIALS" notices are placed on items that are sold at their regular prices.

Further issues identified include the display of notices containing exclusionary clauses that may mislead or disadvantage consumers, the sale of expired products, and improper labeling of food items, such as repacked confectionaries without expiration dates or baked-on dates. These practices not only breach consumer protection laws but also risk public health. In establishments handling food, the Council noted serious lapses in hygiene and safety standards, including staff failing to wear proper protective equipment, uncovered food warmers and cooking ingredients, uncovered rubbish bins, and kitchens requiring cleaning. The presence of flies and the absence of fly-trappers in some premises exacerbate these risks.

In other cases, the Council has also observed retailers failing to disclose the validity periods of sales and promotional notices, leaving consumers uncertain about the duration of advertised offers. Poor store maintenance, including dusty shelves and unhygienic storage conditions, has been another recurring concern. These observations have been made in the first week of December alone.

"The Council's message is clear: traders should refrain from exploiting consumers during this festive season," says Council CEO Seema Shandil. "In response to the violations observed during our market surveillances, we have issued several warning letters to traders and, in certain cases, referred non-compliant businesses to other regulatory authorities such as the Municipal Councils and the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) for further action," adds Shandil.

The Council is also closely monitoring all eateries around the country to ensure no substandard or unhygienic good is being sold to consumers. "Retailers engaged in the food business are

Head Office

Level 5 Vanua House
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva
Phone: 3300792/3310183
CEO: 3305864
Fax: 3300115
Email: complaints@consumersfiji.org

Lautoka/West

Suite 4 Popular Building
Vidilo Street
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka
Phone: 6664987
Email: consumerlkt@connect.com.fj

Labasa/North

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment
Sangam Avenue Street
P.O. Box 64, Labasa
Phone: 8812559
Email: colbs@connect.com.fj



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being reminded of their obligations under the Food Safety Act and warned against cutting corners, as such practices may result in fines or, in extreme cases, closure notices issued by Municipal Council Officers and Health Inspectors,” says Shandil.

Ms Shandil further advised businesses to ‘take these warnings seriously and rectify any breaches immediately to avoid severe penalties and reputational damage.’ As the festive season brings increased foot traffic to businesses, maintaining high standards of compliance and ethical practices is crucial to ensure a safe and positive shopping experience for all.

While the Council will continue its surveillance campaign around the country, consumers are also encouraged to be careful while shopping and report any cases of non-compliance to the Council, via the national consumer helpline, 155 (Toll Free). Consumers can also reach out via social media or through complaints@consumersfiji.org.

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