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FEATURE ARTICLE

Consumer Advisory for the Diwali Season in Fiji

As Diwali draws near, homes and communities across Fiji are being filled with anticipation and joy. The festival of lights brings families together in celebration, symbolising the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, and honesty over deceit. With the festive atmosphere building, this is a timely advisory from the Consumer Council of Fiji to remind consumers to remain vigilant while shopping, both in stores and increasingly, online.

Over the years, the Council has received complaints from consumers who, in their eagerness to prepare for the festive period, have fallen victim to unethical business practices. As Fijians begin their Diwali shopping, the Council urges everyone to make informed and cautious purchasing decisions. This year, two key areas of concern have once again emerged: the purchase of sweets, and the safety and quality of decorative lights.

Bitter Experiences with Sweets

Sweets hold a cherished place in every Diwali celebration. Exchanging sweets with family, friends, and neighbours is a gesture of goodwill and community spirit. As a result, both sweet shops and individuals who prepare sweets from home experience a surge in orders as Diwali approaches. Many families choose to pre-order sweets in large quantities weeks in advance to ensure they have enough to share during the festivities.

However, in recent years, the Council has received several complaints relating to delayed or non-deliveries and poor-quality sweets. These issues have not only caused inconvenience but have also dampened the festive mood for affected consumers. Whether purchasing from established shops or home-based sellers, consumers are urged to remain cautious and ensure they are dealing with reliable and trustworthy suppliers.

Case Study: Late Sweet Delivery

One such complaint came from a consumer who had placed an order worth hundreds of dollars for a variety of sweets from a reputable vendor. The order was intended for Diwali day, when she was expecting guests at her home. Unfortunately, the sweets arrived a day after Diwali, leaving her embarrassed and disappointed as she had nothing to serve her visitors. While unforeseen circumstances can occasionally cause delays, suppliers must ensure that they only

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accept orders they are confident they can fulfill on time. Accepting more orders than can reasonably be delivered not only breaches consumer trust but also harms the reputation of the business.

Case Study: Stale Sweets and Poor Storage

Another recurring concern involves stale or spoiled sweets. Some shops prepare large quantities of sweets well ahead of Diwali to meet expected demand. When these are not packed properly, they lose freshness and quality, resulting in stale products being sold to unsuspecting customers. Such practices are not only unethical but may also pose health risks, especially when dairy-based ingredients are involved. Managing logistics effectively, including preparation schedules, storage conditions, and delivery timelines, is crucial to ensure quality and safety.

Council's Guidance on Sweets

The Consumer Council of Fiji reminds consumers to:

- Inspect sweets before accepting delivery or purchase.
- Check expiry dates and packaging for freshness.
- Avoid last-minute purchases that could compromise quality or availability.
- Retain receipts and order confirmations, which serve as proof of purchase in case a complaint needs to be lodged.

For sweet vendors, the Council strongly advises:

- Accept orders only within the capacity that can be reasonably fulfilled.
- Prioritise hygiene and freshness in preparation and storage.
- Avoid overproduction and ensure proper stock rotation.
- Communicate clearly with customers about delivery times and conditions.

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Festive Lights and Electrical Safety

As Diwali draws near, many households across Fiji are purchasing decorative lights to brighten their homes. While these lights add beauty and festivity, consumers must be cautious when buying and using them.

The Council has previously received complaints from consumers who purchased lights that appeared to work well in stores but stopped functioning shortly after being installed at home. In some cases, the lights failed within just a few hours of use. Such issues highlight concerns about **poor product quality** rather than improper handling by consumers.

Sellers are therefore reminded to ensure that all decorative lights sold meet acceptable safety and quality standards. They must clearly indicate whether each product is suitable for indoor or outdoor use and provide accurate instructions for installation and maintenance. Products intended for outdoor use should be durable enough to withstand Fiji's weather conditions.

The Council urges both sellers and buyers to prioritise **product safety, durability, and clear labelling** to ensure a bright and problem-free Diwali.

Council's Guidance for Festive Shoppers

To ensure a safe and satisfying Diwali shopping experience, the Consumer Council of Fiji advises consumers to:

- Inspect sweets and lights before purchase or upon delivery.
- Check packaging, expiry dates, and warranty or return details before buying.
- Buy from trusted and established vendors—whether in-store or home-based—who provide receipts and proper contact details.
- Test decorative lights where possible before taking them home, and ask for clear usage and installation instructions.
- Familiarise themselves with the seller's return and refund policy, especially for electrical or perishable goods.
- Report any cases of poor-quality, unsafe, or undelivered goods to the Consumer Council immediately.

The Council urges all sellers and manufacturers to act responsibly by maintaining high standards of quality, safety, and honesty in their trade practices. Consumers, in turn, are

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encouraged to stay alert and make informed choices to ensure their Diwali celebrations remain bright, safe, and joyful.

As Diwali nears, the Consumer Council of Fiji will continue to issue advisories and updates to help consumers stay informed, safe, and empowered, ensuring that every home in Fiji celebrates a Diwali that is truly bright, joyful, and fair.

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