



University of Idaho
 College of Agriculture
 Cooperative Extension Service
 Agricultural Experiment Station

Complain! Complain! Complain!

Complain! Not to your neighbor, your husband, or your best friend, but where you can get action.

You probably don't like to complain, but what else can you do when driven by a valid defect in a product? For example, what do you do if a permanent press shirt isn't really permanent press, or a suit falls apart at the seams, or fabric in a garment wears out readily or is not colorfast?

You may complain once and get so frustrated that you quit! But don't give up. Too many shoddy merchandising practices and sloppy, inferior products remain because people don't like to complain. We, as consumers, have a responsibility to complain in order to insure improvement of merchandise and marketing practices in the 70's. Industry cannot know what the consumer is thinking unless we, the consumers, speak up. How, then, should you make a complaint to a retailer or a manufacturer to get fast action?

First Things First

Decide if you have a valid complaint. Did you abuse the garment in any way? You can't expect good performance if you did not follow care instructions or if you gave the garment unreasonable treatment. Some buyers make unjustified complaints and pressure a merchant to make an adjustment on a garment when the merchant really has no responsibility so do so. Businesses try to protect their image, and people sometimes take advantage of that fact by making complaints, demanding adjustments, and leveling criticism at a store when they really have no just cause for such action. But if you have a legitimate complaint, you are ready to inform the store or manufacturer.

Where to Complain

First return to the business and present your complaint. Try to start with the salesperson with whom you did business. If the store has a consumer complaint department, that is the place to go. If you do not get a satisfactory adjustment, ask to see the manager. Usually a business with a reputation for dealing fairly with its customers will make a fair adjustment of complaints, partly because they want to protect their image and partly because they feel it is their responsibility.

If you can't make your complaint in person, write a letter clearly stating your complaint. A letter also makes your complaint a matter of record. A telephone call, on the other hand, is very easy to ignore.

If possible, type your letter. It looks more business-like. Be sure to keep a carbon copy for yourself. Usually typed letters get quicker results and are less likely to get "lost" than hand-written ones. Still, a letter written by hand is better than no letter at all.

If you must telephone, keep your cool no matter how angry you are. If you're angry, you will forget to give key facts. Ask the name of the person you are talking to; it's easier to deal with someone with a name.

State the Facts

If possible, take the garment with you when making a complaint. Be sure to tell the salesclerk all the pertinent information about it.

1. Where and when you bought it.
2. Price.
3. How long or number of times it has been worn.
4. Care given the garment; for example, laundering procedure, number of times laundered, and if possible the type of detergent used.
5. What is wrong with the garment.
6. Other pertinent information which would help the person understand your complaint.

Keep sales slips, price tags and care instructions. If you complain in person, take along these records and copies of any letters you may have already written about the garment. Don't send them in a letter or give them to the salesclerk.



This publication was prepared by Janice Buckner, Extension Clothing Specialist, based partially on a Washington State University publication, E.M. 3357.

Don't get angry; let the facts speak for themselves. Be polite! Sarcastic or abusive letters, phone calls, or people are easily ignored by the complaint manager. Handled well, humor can make your complaint stand out and speed up results.

When customers are honest and friendly, retailers more often than not will lean over backwards to make an adjustment—even when the complainers may be more at fault than the garment.

Start a Rumpus!

Sometimes, you, the consumer, need to start a real rumpus. You may have to write to the manufacturer to get a proper adjustment. If that doesn't get results, address a letter directly to the president of the company that manufactures the garment. The president's secretary will act quickly upon your complaint. Restate the facts and include a summary of correspondence with other company employees.

Don't give up! If stronger action than mere complaints is needed, or if the case involves actual fraud or deception rather than just a complaint about the quality of something you purchased, you may want to report the matter to the Attorney General of your state or to the Better Business Bureau in your community. In any event, insist on getting satisfaction of a valid complaint. Every consumer in the market place has rights. Stand up for yours as a buyer. Most retailers and manufacturers agree that complaints not only keep them on their toes but can even lead to increased sales and profits.

What to Do in Idaho

If the merchant or manufacturer will not take care of your complaint, contact the Office of the Attorney General and state your complaint.

Attorney General's Staff
Business Regulation Division
Statehouse, Room 225
Boise, Idaho 83720
208-384-2400

The local Chamber of Commerce may be able to help with consumer complaints.

Also, the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Service is now a part of a coordinated consumer protection system serving Idaho consumers. Your county Extension office will help:

- Counsel you relative to consumer-oriented laws.
- Refer you to appropriate agencies if problems cannot be resolved locally.
- Develop and implement an educational program by which you can be informed of rights and procedures under the law.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) handles cases involving consumer protection including textile products that are mislabeled. They also have responsibility for policing the Flammable Fabrics Act. The FTC cannot act in the settlement of private controversies or in the interest of a private party. Any action brought by the Commission must be invested with public interest. To contact the Federal Trade Commission:

Consumer Product Safety Commission
1131 Federal Building
909 First Ave.
Seattle, Washington 98104

Be a Bright Consumer

If you act intelligently as a consumer there will be fewer dishonest claims on your clothing dollar and fewer violations of laws made specifically for your protection. Reading labels, knowing brand names, and being familiar with fabric, fibers, and finishes can help you judge quality. Knowing how to determine quality merchandise can help save time in the selection of clothing and will result in increased satisfaction with the garments you purchase.

Complain when you have a valid reason—not only about a money loss, but about rude salespeople, late deliveries, confusing or incorrect labels, deceptive advertising, or outright gyps. Perhaps it's embarrassing to admit you've made a mistake, but your complaints will win better service and better products for yourself and other shoppers.

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