

# CONSUMER INFOSHEET



## Filing a Complaint with Consumer Services

This publication is intended to provide general information only and is not a substitute for legal advice.

The Consumer Services Division of Service Alberta is responsible for Alberta's consumer protection and tenancy laws. This infosheet will explain how to file a complaint with Consumer Services and when an investigation may be opened, as well as other options available to consumers.

### 1. WHAT MATTERS DOES CONSUMER SERVICES ADDRESS?

Areas covered by Consumer Services include:

- Auctions
- Cemeteries
- Charitable Fund-raising
- Collection Agencies
- Credit Reports
- Door-to-Door Sales
- Employment Agencies
- Energy Marketing
- Gift Cards
- Home Inspections (as of September 2011)
- Landlords and Tenants (Mobile Home Sites and Residential Tenancies)
- Payday Loans
- Prepaid Contracting
- Time Shares & Travel Clubs
- Unfair trade practices

More information on each topic, as well as specific tipsheets, can be found at [www.servicealberta.ca](http://www.servicealberta.ca)> Consumer Information. You can also get this information by calling the Consumer Contact Centre or visiting your local Consumer Services office.

If you are not sure if your specific issue can be investigated, or if you need advice on what you can do to deal with matters not covered by Consumer Services, you can call the **Consumer Contact Centre** at 1-877-427-4088 for more information (Toll-free in Alberta).

### 2. ARE ALL COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED?

Consumer Services is not able to investigate every complaint that is received. Investigators look at violations of certain sections of consumer protection and tenancy laws, which are defined as offences. Some issues are not considered an offence, while others might not need to be addressed through an investigation.

Your complaint can only be addressed if it is about a specific incident involving you personally, or if you are a designated agent for the person involved in a consumer or tenancy issue. General or anonymous complaints will not be accepted. In addition, normally only complaints between businesses and consumers or landlords and tenants can be investigated. Consumer Services cannot usually address complaints between businesses.

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Every complaint is reviewed to determine if an offence has occurred and if an investigation is warranted. Consumer Services might consider factors including whether a business has prior complaint history, the number of people affected, and the vulnerability of the consumers. If the review shows further action is appropriate, an investigation will be opened. If an investigation is not warranted, the complaint will be kept on file for future reference. Information might also be sent to the business about the laws and their obligations.

You will be advised if an investigation is opened. You will also be notified if an investigation will not occur, or if information will be sent to the business. If there will not be an investigation, and there are other options available to you, these will be explained.

### 3. HOW CAN I FILE A COMPLAINT?

All complaints need to be filed with Consumer Services in writing. There are several ways you can file your complaint:

- Complete and submit the online complaint form, available at [www.servicealberta.ca](http://www.servicealberta.ca)>Consumer Information>Filing a Consumer Complaint, or
- Send the completed complaint form located on pages 7 and 8 and mail or fax to the appropriate Consumer Services office, or
- Print the complaint form available at [www.servicealberta.ca](http://www.servicealberta.ca)>Consumer Information>Filing a Consumer Complaint. Mail the completed complaint form with your documents to the appropriate Consumer Services office, or
- Bring the completed complaint form and your documents in person to a Consumer Services office.

Consumer Services offices are located at:

Northern Alberta

(Locations serviced by **780** area code):

#### **Service Alberta Investigation Services - North**

3rd Floor, Commerce Place

10155 – 102 Street

Edmonton AB T5J 4L4

Fax: 780-422-9106

E-mail: [nfs@gov.ab.ca](mailto:nfs@gov.ab.ca)

Southern Alberta

(Locations serviced by **403** area code):

#### **Service Alberta Investigation Services – South**

301, 7015 MacLeod Trail S

Calgary AB T2H 2K6

Fax: 403-297-4270

E-mail: [sfs@gov.ab.ca](mailto:sfs@gov.ab.ca)

Make sure your complaint includes your current address, day time telephone number(s), and e-mail address if applicable, so we can contact you.

You will need to list all of the relevant details you have. These may include:

- dates and times
- addresses
- names of people involved
- witnesses
- contact information for you and the business.

You will also need to provide copies of all the documents you have related to the issue. These may include:

- contracts or rental agreements
- receipts or proof of payment
- cancellation or dispute letters
- e-mails or letters
- statements of account
- audio or video recordings

Please do not send original documents with your complaint. Copies are sufficient to review the file. You should keep originals in a safe place in case they are needed later, either as part of the investigation or for other actions you may take. Please make sure you do not alter or make notes on your documents, as these may be needed in their original condition.

You will be contacted once your complaint is reviewed. The review might take several days or weeks, depending on the nature of your complaint and the number and type of other complaints received at the time. We will contact you if more information is needed to review your complaint.

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• **Note:** Your name and the issues you raised will be shared if an investigation is opened or if information is sent to the business. This is done so the business knows who is making the complaint and has the opportunity to respond. If there is specific information you do not wish to be provided to the business, please state this in your complaint and this will be taken into account in the review.

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## 4. OTHER OPTIONS FOR COMPLAINTS

### General Options

There might be other organizations that can look into your issue, along with filing a complaint with Consumer Services. You can use them even if your complaint is investigated by Consumer Services, if any of these options apply to you.

- Approach the business directly and explain your concerns to them, if you haven't done so already. Let them know what outcome you want from the situation and see what they might be willing to offer you in response. You may wish to do this before filing a complaint, to see if you can settle the matter without having to take further steps.
- Contact your local Better Business Bureau and submit your complaint against the business. They keep tallies of complaints filed against businesses, and assign them a reliability rating. Contact information is located at the end of this tipsheet.
- If the business or the person involved is part of a specific professional or industry association, contact the association to see what options might be available for complaints or mediation to resolve the matter.
- If you have a claim for an amount up to \$25,000, you can file a civil action through the **Provincial Court, Civil Division**. More information on this process is available through your local courthouse or at [www.albertacourts.ab.ca](http://www.albertacourts.ab.ca).

- If you have a claim for an amount up to \$25,000 against your landlord or tenant, you can file an action through the **Residential Tenancy Dispute Resolution Service**. This service is currently available in most areas of the province, excluding part of Southern Alberta. For more information on the process, including application forms and the areas in which it is available, visit [www.rtdrs.alberta.ca](http://www.rtdrs.alberta.ca) or phone 780-644-3000.
- If you have a claim for more than \$25,000, you should seek legal advice before filing a civil action. The **Lawyer Referral Service**, offered by the Law Society of Alberta, will provide the names of three lawyers practicing in the applicable field of law. They can be reached at 1-800-661-1095. More information is available at [www.lawsociety.ab.ca/public/lawyer\\_referral.aspx](http://www.lawsociety.ab.ca/public/lawyer_referral.aspx).
- If your complaint is about a potential criminal matter, such as assault, theft, fraud, or harassment, contact your local police detachment to file a report.

There might be other options that are specific to your issues listed on the relevant tipsheet at [www.servicealberta.ca](http://www.servicealberta.ca)>Consumer Information. You could also contact the **Consumer Contact Centre** at 1-877-427-4088 to learn more about these options.

## INDUSTRY SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS

The following organizations are delegated to handle complaints in their industry. Please contact them directly, instead of filing a complaint with Consumer Services, if your complaint is in one of these areas.

### Funeral Services

Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board  
1-800-563-4652 (Toll-free in Alberta)  
[www.afsrb.ab.ca](http://www.afsrb.ab.ca)

### Insurance

Complaints against insurance agents, brokers and adjusters:

Alberta Insurance Council  
780-421-4148 (Edmonton)  
403-233-2929 (Calgary)  
[www.abcouncil.ab.ca](http://www.abcouncil.ab.ca)

Complaints about insurance companies:

Superintendent of Insurance  
Alberta Finance and Enterprise  
780-422-1592

Dial 310-0000 followed by the number for toll-free calling in Alberta  
[www.finance.alberta.ca/business/insurance](http://www.finance.alberta.ca/business/insurance)

**Motor Vehicles**

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council  
780-466-1140 (Edmonton)  
403-301-2744 (Calgary)  
[www.amvic.org](http://www.amvic.org)

**Real Estate**

Real Estate Council of Alberta  
1-888-425-2754 (Toll-free in Alberta)  
[www.reca.ab.ca](http://www.reca.ab.ca)

**Securities and Investments**

Alberta Securities Commission  
Inquiries  
1-877-355-4488 (Toll-free in Alberta)  
Complaints: 403-355-3888  
[www.albertasecurities.com](http://www.albertasecurities.com)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For additional information about filing a consumer complaint, call:

**Consumer Contact Centre:**

Edmonton: 780-427-4088  
1-877-427-4088 (Toll-free in Alberta)  
[www.servicealberta.ca](http://www.servicealberta.ca)

For more information on filing a complaint with the Better Business Bureau, contact:

**Better Business Bureau of Central and Northern Alberta**

Edmonton: 780-482-2341  
1-800-232-7298 (Toll-free in Alberta)  
[www.edmontonbbb.org](http://www.edmontonbbb.org)

**Better Business Bureau in Southern Alberta and East Kootenays**

Calgary: 403-517-4222  
1-800-661-4464 (Toll-free in Southern Alberta)  
[www.betterbusinessbureau.ca](http://www.betterbusinessbureau.ca)





# Consumer Complaint Form



Current Date

Name

Address

City  Prov  Postal Code

Country

Work Phone Number

Home Phone Number

Cellphone Number

Email

Complaint category (please check one):

- Cemetery Services
- Residential Tenancies
- Negative Options
- Direct Selling
- Employment Agencies
- Collection Practices
- Bond Claims
- Pre-Need Cemetery Services
- Mobile Home Site Tenancies
- Credit Reporting
- Home Renovations
- Natural Gas Marketing
- Electricity Marketing
- Credit Contracts
- Charitable Solicitations
- Loan Brokers
- Time Shares
- Retail Home Sales
- Auctions
- Unfair Trade Practices

Other

Name of Business

Address

City  Prov  Postal Code

Country

Phone Number (if known)

Contact Person(s) for the company

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Please provide a brief factual description of the problem you experienced. To help us review your complaint, please be sure to include details such as date, location, name of persons you dealt with, witnesses if any and what documents you have available.

(If you need more space please use additional sheets and attach them to your complaint form.)

Please be sure to fill out the entire form, attach a copy of your supporting documents and send them to the following address depending on which part of the province you reside in:

**780 area code**

**Service Alberta**  
Investigation Services North  
3rd floor Commerce Place  
10155 - 102 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4  
Fax: 780-422-9106

**403 area code**

**Service Alberta**  
Investigation Services South  
301, 7015 MacLeod Trail S  
Calgary, Alberta T2H 2K6  
Fax: 403-297-4270