



DATCP Releases Top Ten Consumer Complaints for 2018

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Editor's Note: For interview requests about the top complaints, please contact Jerad Albracht by email: jerad.albracht@wisconsin.gov.

MADISON – ...and the number one consumer complaint is...

Telemarketing complaints are on the rise (4,860 complaints) and continue to top the annual list of consumer complaints collected by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). More than two out of every five complaints received by the agency in 2018 were in regard to calls from unknown numbers, unwanted sales calls or scam calls. This represents a 17% increase in telemarketing complaints over 2017.

“Consumers are frustrated with the amount of unwanted calls that they receive,” said Lara Sutherlin, administrator for the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. “At best, these calls are a disruptive nuisance; at worst, they are a threat to the personal and financial information that consumers work hard to protect.”

“Until a fix is identified, many Wisconsin consumers report having some success in minimizing the disruption of robocalls by using call-blocking apps for their mobile phones and letting unknown calls ring through to voicemail,” Sutherlin added.

In only its second year as a formal complaint category, **Medical Services** jumped two spots to number five with 255 complaints – an increase of more than 30% from 2017’s count (195 in 2017). These complaints cover services related to clinics, hospitals and professional services in the medical field and were overwhelmingly about billing disputes, misrepresentations and unauthorized charges. This category does not include complaints regarding health care providers, medical devices, procedures or products.

“When you have transactions that involve hospitals, specialty clinics, independent providers and more, the paperwork can become complex quickly,” said Sutherlin. “Medical bills and terminology are puzzling for many consumers, and we are increasingly hearing from Wisconsin residents who are seeking help with having their voices heard in these transactions.”

Landlord/Tenant complaints held steady at the second spot with 1,188 complaints. Complaint allegations were primarily in regard to security deposit-related issues, with tenants claiming that inappropriate amounts were withheld or that a landlord failed to return deposit funds at the end of a tenancy. Evictions and unauthorized entry were additional issues cited in many complaints.

“One of the best protections for a tenant is to be educated on your rights and responsibilities as a renter under Wisconsin law,” said Sutherlin. “DATCP offers useful resources on its website to help landlords and tenants alike stay informed about changes in state rental laws.”

Given that nearly every consumer in the state has a mobile phone, home internet service, cable/satellite television package, or bundled service agreement, it is no surprise that **Telecommunications** remains in the number three spot in the Top Ten list with 681 complaints. Complaints were lodged against a wide spectrum of service providers, with customers making allegations about billing disputes, misleading representations, unauthorized charges and performance issues.

Home Improvement moved up one spot to number four in the list with 489 complaints (up more than 20% over 2017). Home improvement complaints include a wide range of

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allegations, with consumers alleging that contractors failed to provide the services promised under a contract, charged for services or repairs that were not performed, failed to honor warranties or provided unsatisfactory workmanship.

Rounding out the top ten for 2018:

6.) **Identity Theft** (250 complaints)

- The primary identity theft issues included fraud, tax identity theft, misuse of Social Security numbers and unauthorized account access.

7.) **Motor Vehicle Repair** (196)

- Complaints commonly involved unauthorized charges, workmanship, and failures to provide services or honor warranties.

8.) **Gas Pumps** (169; received by DATCP's Bureau of Weights and Measures)

- Complaints were primarily from consumers concerned about gas pump accuracy and credit card skimmers in gas pumps.

9.) **Motor Vehicle Sales** (155)

- Complaints involved inadequate disclosures and misrepresentations.

10.) **Fuel Quality** (119; received by DATCP's Bureau of Weights and Measures)

- Fuel Quality complaints centered on concerns about the quality of fuel at retail stations.

In all, DATCP received 11,303 complaints to the Bureau of Consumer Protection and another 390 to the Bureau of Weights & Measures. The agency returned more than \$4.6 million in funds to Wisconsin – the majority of which were returned to consumers in the form of mediated refunds, negotiated settlements or court-ordered restitutions.

“Consumers facing issues with businesses are always encouraged to learn more through the many resources offered on the DATCP website. If you need additional help, we are proud to provide guidance through our Consumer Protection Hotline or to help you navigate the situation through our complaint mediation team,” said Sutherlin.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <https://datcp.wi.gov>, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcphotline@wi.gov.

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**Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection**

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STATISTICS

<u>2018</u>		<u>2018 - # of</u>	<u>2017 - # of</u>
<u>Rank</u>	<u>Product Category</u>	<u>Complaints</u>	<u>Complaints</u>
1	Telemarketing	4,860	4,147
2	Landlord/Tenant	1,188	1,141
3	Telecommunications	681	763
4	Home Improvement	489	403
5	Medical Services	255	195
6	Identity Theft	250	453
7	Motor Vehicle Repair	196	182
8	Gas Pumps	169	232
9	Motor Vehicle Sales	155	149
10	Fuel Quality	119	113

Total number of complaints recorded by
the Bureau of Consumer Protection in 2018: 11,303

Total number of complaints recorded by
the Bureau of Weights and Measures in 2018
(includes Gas Pumps and Fuel Quality categories): 390