

If you cannot see the links or images in this email, [click here](#).

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE | OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL | ATTORNEY GENERAL TOM MILLER

Consumer Focus

NOVEMBER 2016

Getting Static about Your Satellite or Cable TV Complaint?

Complaints about satellite and cable television regularly make the Consumer Protection Division's top ten consumer complaint list. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reports the same on a national scale. Complaints include promotional offers, billing, contracts, cancellations, general service, and signal quality.

Satellite TV

Satellite TV companies transmit signals that users receive through a satellite dish. Satellite TV service is available in areas where a satellite dish has line-of-site exposure to the provider's satellite signal. In some cases, apartment, condominium, and rental property restrictions may limit or restrict satellite system installations. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has primary regulatory authority over satellite television providers.

Cable TV

Cable TV companies transmit signals through a cable. The Iowa Utilities Board and some municipalities authorize the construction and operation of cable systems through what are called franchise agreements. Franchise agreements establish certain service and system standards, and certain public, educational, and government access programming requirements. The Iowa Utilities Board does not regulate the rates or service of cable TV service providers, and cable companies are responsible for their channel offerings and programming options.

Know Your TV Provider

Are you dealing with the provider directly or a third-party seller? Third parties sell contracts for providing installation and service (generally for satellite TV). If you are considering ordering services through a third-party seller (including phone service providers who provide package deals for satellite TV service), make sure you know where the seller does business, how to contact the seller and provider, and who is responsible if you are unsatisfied with the installation, service, or price. Get everything in writing, including any promises you may hear from a provider or third-party seller.

Promotional/Introductory Offers

Make sure you understand exactly what a provider is offering and charging—now and later—through a promotional or introductory offer. That includes introductory rates (so-called “teaser rates”) for new subscribers that expire at some point, and program bundling—the practice of offering channels as packages and not individually. Be sure you are clear about all up-front charges, any monthly equipment charges, when the promotional rate ends, when the full rate begins, and how much the full rate will cost. Finally, make sure you understand how long you can evaluate your satellite or cable service, including the signal quality, before you can cancel without facing a penalty.

Read Your Monthly Bill

Are you getting charged for something you didn’t request or getting overcharged for something you did order? Review your monthly bill to find out. If you have a billing dispute, contact your service provider.

Early Termination Fee?

If you are thinking about stopping your service, first check your service contract or contact the provider to find out if you are subject to an early termination fee. An early termination fee may apply if you end a service contract if it expires. If a provider charges you a termination fee without your knowledge or authorization, dispute the matter with your provider or credit/debit card issuer.

Service/Signal Quality Issues

If you have a problem with your signal, contact your provider—particularly if you are in a trial period. (Satellite TV customers can experience signal difficulties if there are obstructions, including buildings, and trees.) Make sure you are fully satisfied before your trial period ends. If you contact a customer service representative, note the date, time, person you spoke with, and a summary of what occurred.

Complaints

Always start with your provider. If you cannot resolve the problem and you are a cable customer, check your cable bill for information about your franchising authority. State law requires companies with franchises issued by the Utilities Board to maintain a local or toll-free telephone number for customer service contact and to implement an informal process for handling inquiries from customers concerning billing, service issues, and other complaints. If you believe a provider or third-party seller has engaged in an unfair sales practice, billing practice or consumer fraud, contact our Consumer Protection Division. For other complaints, including programming complaints, contact the Federal Communication Commission at www.fcc.gov or 888-225-5322.

Consumer Protection Division | 1305 E Walnut St | Hoover Building | Des Moines, IA 50319
Phone: 515-281-5926 | Toll Free: 888-777-4590 (Outside Des Moines Area) | consumer@iowa.gov

Did you receive a forwarded copy of this newsletter? [Subscribe here](#) to receive the Monthly Consumer Focus newsletter delivered directly to your inbox!

You are receiving this email because %_Email% is signed up to receive communications from the Office of the Iowa Attorney General. To unsubscribe from future emails, please click the link below.

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

