

Complaints about Broadcast Advertising

The FCC occasionally receives complaints from consumers about broadcast advertising. These complaints concern a wide variety of issues, including:

- The nature of the products being advertised
- The timing of certain ads
- Commercials believed to be indecent or in poor taste
- False and misleading advertisements

Are there laws that limit material stations can broadcast?

Stations are restricted from broadcasting material that promotes certain lotteries; advertises cigarettes, little cigars or smokeless tobacco products; or perpetuates a fraud. Some advertisements also may violate regulations that fall under the jurisdiction of other federal agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration or the Federal Trade Commission.

Additionally, federal laws prohibit or limit obscene, indecent or profane language. Obscene broadcasts are prohibited at all times, while indecent or profane broadcasts are prohibited during certain hours. For more information, see our guide on Obscene, Indecent and Profane Broadcasts at fcc.gov/guides/obscenity-indecency-and-profanity.

What if I think a specific ad is false or misleading?

Broadcasters are responsible for selecting the broadcast material that airs on their stations, including advertisements. The FCC expects broadcasters to be responsible to the community they serve and act with reasonable care to ensure that advertisements aired on their stations are not false or misleading.

The FTC has primary responsibility for determining whether specific advertising is false or misleading, and for taking action against the sponsors of such material. To file a complaint with the FTC, go to ftccomplaintassistant.gov or call toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).

Filing a complaint

If you feel an ad violates FCC rules, you can file a complaint with us. You have multiple options for filing:

- File a complaint online at consumercomplaints.fcc.gov
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Alternate formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

Last Reviewed 11/17/17

