

Consumer Alert

Providing consumers with knowledge to make informed choices and decisions.

Celebrating 30 Years of Service

A Publication of the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs

Brandolyn Thomas Pinkston, Administrator

To receive a free subscription to the *Consumer Alert*, e-mail consumer_alert@dca.state.sc.us

LIVE Online Help For Consumers



The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) has made it easier for consumers to get assistance on-line with its new web-based program, **Ask Consumer Affairs**. This interactive forum provides consumers with the ability to ask important consumer related

questions and receive a timely response. Brandolyn Thomas Pinkston, Administrator said, "The goal is to make receiving helpful information easy and fast." Through **Ask Consumer Affairs** effort, the Department continues its commitment to educating and informing South Carolinians, so they can make good and wise choices in the marketplace.

Department staff initiated a pilot of the **Ask Consumer Affairs** program in late November 2005. Since that time, more than 500 on-line discussions have occurred on topics ranging from scams, fraud, mortgage loans, credit, buying cars, and how to file a complaint with the Department.

This is an effort by the Department to utilize technology to better serve the citizens of South Carolina. The LIVE on-line service is available Monday through Friday – 8:30 A.M.– 5:00 P.M. To access this new feature, go to the Department's Website at www.sconsumer.gov (click on **LIVE HELP**) and a communication specialist will be there to assist you.

ARE YOU CONSUMER SMART?

Take the Grand Slam Challenge

To take the Grand Slam Challenge go to our website www.sconsumer.gov and click on Consumer Education. For more information on consumer protection or to request a speaker on consumer issues call 1.800.922.1594 or 803.734.4191.

Consumers Should Not Pass On This FREE Offer

Consumers should take advantage of the opportunity to obtain a free copy of their credit report. Your credit report reflects where you live, how you pay your bills, and whether you have been sued or filed for bankruptcy. Additionally, make sure that all information on your report is accurate. To obtain a copy of your credit report, log on to www.annualcreditreport.com, call 877-322-8228, or complete the Annual Credit Report Request form found on the Federal Trade Commission Website (FTC) at www.ftc.gov/credit and mail it to: Annual Credit Report Request Services, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta GA 30348-5281.

Annualcreditreport.com is the ONLY official Website offering a FREE copy of your credit report. You should beware of sites, E-mails, pop-ups, and links that charge a fee for its product and services. For more information contact the SCDCA at 803.734.4200 or 800.922.1594 (toll free in SC).

Buyer

Questions About a Business?

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs' Buyer Beware List has answers. Check the list at http://www.sconsumer.gov/buyer_beware_list.pdf in order to protect yourself as a consumer of products and services in South Carolina.

You can contact the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs at www.state.sc.us/consumer, (803) 734.4200, or 1.800.922.1594 (toll free in SC, or 3600 Forest Drive, P.O. Box 5757 Columbia SC 29250).

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs

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About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection Code in 1974, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina consumers.

Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education. For more information, visit www.sconsumer.gov.

Don't Get Soaked Buying A Flood-Damaged Vehicle

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Rita, and the floods in the northeast, consumers may want to add flood damage to the list of things to look for when purchasing a used vehicle. Potential scammers are refurbishing these flood-damaged vehicles and selling them to consumers without them knowing the full damage of the vehicles. Vehicles that have been under water can have serious mechanical or electrical problems that would not be visible at the time of purchase. Bacteria and mold may also cause health problems for consumers. Listed are a few consumer tips to help avoid buying one of these vehicles, unknowingly:



- **Inspect:** Check the trunk, glove compartment, the dashboard, and below the seats for water damage such as silt, mud, or rust.
- **Examine:** Examine the interior closely, make sure that the upholstery and carpeting matches and fits tight, if it doesn't this could be a sign that it has been replaced. Also check for discoloring, faded or stained material, which also could be a sign of serious water damage.
- **Turn-on:** Turn the ignition key and make sure that the warning, accessory lights, and gauges come on and are working properly.

For more information on flood-damaged vehicles log on to www.sccoconsumer.gov to get a FREE copy of **Don't Get Soaked Buying a Flood-Damaged Vehicle** brochure.



LifeSmarts is a national educational program aimed to develop consumer and marketplace skills for teenagers, grades 9th-12th grade. On March 3rd three teams from across the state competed in the state competition at the Lutheran Seminary in Columbia, SC. SCDCA would like to congratulate the Trinity Titans from Trinity Collegiate for advancing to the national competition. They will represent SC and compete for the national LifeSmarts title on April 22nd-25th in Philadelphia, PA. Special thanks to Lower Richland Superstars from Lower Richland High School and the Hartsvillie Lady Foxes from Hartvillie High School for a job well done in the state competition. For more information, contact Sherry G. King, LifeSmarts State Coordinator at 803.734.4195 or 1.800.922.1594 (toll free in SC).

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Recalls Paintball Markers

The CPSC and Brass Eagle of Bentonville, Ark. has issued a voluntary recall of the Blade Turbo and Paintball Breakout Kit.



The recalled Blade Turbo paintball marker is bright blue with a black handgrip on the nozzle. Two carbon dioxide cartridges(CO2) are inserted into the back of the marker covered by a clear plastic screw-on cap. The silver-colored carbon dioxide cartridges are about three-inches long. The Paintball Breakout Players Kit includes a Blade Turbo, black mask and CO2 cartridges. "Blade Turbo" is printed on the side of the paintball marker.

The CO2 cartridges can be forcibly ejected out the back of the paintball marker and break the plastic screw-on cap. This could pose a risk to the operator who might be hit with the CO2 cartridges or the plastic screw-on cap. Consumers should know that overtightening the screw-on cap after the cartridges are pierced can result in a serious impact injury.

The Blade Turbo was sold at Wal-Mart, Kmart and sporting goods retailers nationwide from January 2005 through January 2006 for about \$20. The Paintball Breakout Kit was sold at Wal-Mart from October 2005 through January 2006 for about \$25.

Consumers should immediately stop using the product and contact Brass Eagle to receive a free replacement screw-on cap which is black, instead of clear. For more information call toll-free (866) 363-8241 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday-Friday or email Brass Eagle at recall@brasseagle.com.

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