

Broadcast Advertising

The FCC receives numerous 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 (FDA) or the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Obscene broadcasts are prohibited at all times, while indecent or profane broadcasts are prohibited during certain hours. Violators are subject to sanctions that include civil penalties, criminal fines, license revocation and/or imprisonment of not more than two years. For more information, see our guide on Obscene, Indecent and Profane Broadcasts at www.fcc.gov/guides/obscenity-indecency-and-profanity.

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

Broadcasters are responsible for 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 <https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov>, or call toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).

Filing a complaint

If you have a complaint about an advertisement that you consider offensive because it is obscene, indecent or profane, you have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include 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

Accessible 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 above, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

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This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

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