

# BEING CONSUMER SAVVY

OR

## PREVENTING PROBLEMS NOW RATHER THAN SOLVING PROBLEMS LATER

### RED FLAGS:

- A savvy consumer listens to that little voice that asks “Should I *really* be doing this?” When you’re “hearing” that question, think it over for a day or two and do some research. “Consumer Topics” at [www.consumeraction.gov](http://www.consumeraction.gov) are very informative.
- Friends, family members, significant others, classmates, co-workers, and fellow church members have frequently been known to take advantage of good-hearted people.
- There is no three-day grace period to change your mind after signing paperwork (with only a very, very few exceptions) ----- and buying a car or putting a deposit on an apartment are NOT exceptions!
- If you are rushed into signing the paperwork before you read it completely, wonder what it is they don’t want you to notice. If you sign something without reading every word of it, you are probably stuck with it! **BEFORE YOU SIGN, make sure that what you sign agrees with what you have been told verbally. Get copies of everything you sign.**

### RENTING A HOUSE OR APARTMENT:

- Read the lease carefully. Make sure there are no blank spaces. Make sure it names the specific apartment you will be renting. Double check when you must give a move out notice. Many leases now require a 60-day move out notice.
- DO NOT SIGN until you **inspect the specific apartment** you will be renting. You want to make sure where you will be living is as clean and spacious as the model apartment.
- Before renting, call the police substation to ask about crime at that apartment complex or in that neighborhood. Talk with other tenants about the complex.
- Check Texas landlord-tenant law websites. You can see what Texas law says about getting the landlord to make repairs, getting your security deposit returned and the eviction process. Informative websites include:  
[www.texastenant.org](http://www.texastenant.org)   [www.houstontenants.org](http://www.houstontenants.org)   [www.housing-rights.org](http://www.housing-rights.org)

### MONEY: Direct Loans and Co-signing

- Loan money or co-sign a note **ONLY** if you would give THAT AMOUNT of money as a GIFT to THAT PERSON right now. Expect that the money borrowed WILL NOT be returned. Expect that you WILL have to pay off that co-signed note. Better to be pleasantly surprised when the loan is repaid than to be unpleasantly upset when it is not!
- If co-signing, insist that any notices of delinquency be sent to you immediately after a payment is missed. Get that agreement in writing from the lender **BEFORE YOU SIGN!**
- Co-signing means that you are as responsible for the debt as the person taking out the loan. You are not just vouching for that person, you are accepting the debt. It WILL be reported on your credit.

Provided Courtesy of:

**Bexar County Dispute Resolution Center**  
**(210) 335-2128      [www.bexar.org/drc](http://www.bexar.org/drc)**

## **CARS AND TRUCKS:**

- When buying a vehicle, new OR used, shop around. Prices and “bonus inducements” vary. Beware of buying a vehicle because “it looks good.”
- If buying a used vehicle, take it to an independent mechanic to check out before signing any papers. The seller is trying to sell a car. They may tell you it is in perfect condition, has never been in an accident or been flooded. Get promises and guarantees in writing.
- Review the documents you will be signing before you sign them. Make sure the price, interest rate and any “extras” are included in the written document. Make sure there are no blank spaces. If there are any blanks, draw lines through them.
- Relying on a Carfax or similar report can be risky since they have limited database access. Not all states or insurance companies file the reports used by companies who provide a vehicle history.
- Ask to see the actual title before signing paperwork. Sometimes the individual or business selling the car does not hold the title. It may be difficult (or even impossible) for you to get the title to register the car after you have given the seller your money.
- DO NOT drive the car off the lot until all the financing papers are complete and the financing has been approved by the bank or lending company.
- GET COPIES OF EVERY SINGLE SHEET OF PAPER YOU SIGN.
- IF SELLING a vehicle:
  - Get the buyer’s information off the driver’s license so you have a name, address, etc. Verify that the address is current. Get phone numbers for the buyer – and call them to be sure the numbers are good.
  - Think about signing over the title at the Tax Assessor-Collector’s office so you know immediately that the car is no longer in your name.
  - File a Vehicle Transfer Notification available at Texas Department of Motor Vehicles website. This puts on record that you sold that vehicle and to whom. This does not transfer the title, but will be a defense if the buyer is in an accident or incurs fines or tolls but the car is still in your name.

## **HOME REPAIRS OR REMODELING:**

- Call Better Business Bureau, Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division, and City of San Antonio Development Services to check out contractors before signing or paying. Ask Development Services if a permit is required for your job. Licensed contractors can pull permits; unlicensed ones cannot. The customer should not pull permits.
- Get several written estimates detailing the work to be done and the materials to be used. Include start and finish dates, and a penalty clause for work that goes over schedule. All changes should be made in writing. Specify that final payment is contingent on the contractor providing you with signed releases from subcontractors that they have been paid. DO NOT provide final payment until the job is done to your satisfaction.

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