



UNDERSTANDING MAIL-IN REBATES

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

THRIFTY CONSUMERS know the benefits of clipping coupons and redeeming instant cash rebates at the checkout counter. Manufacturers and retailers often draw in shoppers by offering these immediate discounts at the time of purchase.

But many rebates are of the mail-in variety, which can cause some confusion. The consumer is required to pay the full price of the item at the time of purchase, and then send proper documentation to the manufacturer or retailer in order to receive a full or partial reimbursement by mail.

Typically, consumers must provide copies of the rebate slip, the sales receipt, the service agreement or invoice, the UPC code, and the customer's name, address and telephone number. The paperwork usually has to be postmarked no later than 30 days from the date of purchase. Consumers generally receive their rebates up to 12 weeks

later. The rebate check itself may have an expiration date and need to be cashed by a specific date.

Our office encourages consumers who are trying to claim mail-in rebates to keep good records of the purchase. Follow the instructions on the rebate form carefully and submit all required documentation timely when filing for a rebate. Keep a copy of what you send the manufacturer or retailer so that you have a record of the transaction in case problems arise.

The Federal Trade Commission advises that, by law, companies are required to send rebates within the time frame promised, or if no time is specified, within a "reasonable" time frame. "Reasonable" often is interpreted as within 30 days.

If you don't receive your rebate check as promised or within a reasonable time frame, contact the company first. Look for an address to write to or a phone number to call.

Most manufacturers and retailers will make a good faith effort to try and resolve disputes with their customers. Many times, a lack of notice to a customer that a rebate check will be late is the result of poor customer service, rather than a violation of the law.

If you're dissatisfied with the way the matter is handled, however, or the rebate check never arrives or is late, you may file a complaint with my office online at www.oag.state.tx.us or by phone at 1 (800) 252-8011. You may also file a complaint with the Better Business Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission.

Consumers often ask about missing out on a rebate check. Patience and an eye for detail are the keys to most mail-in rebates. Read the fine print of the rebate agreement and familiarize yourself with the expiration dates of the offer so that you can claim the promised discount.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



UNDERSTANDING MAIL-IN REBATES

- Keep close track of the date of purchase, the expiration date of the rebate offer, and the expiration date on the rebate check.
- Submit required paperwork in a timely fashion.
- Keep copies of the transaction for your own records.

If your rebate never arrives or arrives late, file a complaint with the Attorney General's office online at www.oag.state.tx.us or by phone at 1 (800) 252-8011.



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