



## CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMISSION

An agency of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries  
*"Protecting Your Rights, Securing Our Future"*

# Consumer Matters

ISSUE APRIL - JUNE 2020

## Good news about bad gas

The Consumer Affairs Commission on May 22, 2020 informed consumers who had been affected by bad gas and had successfully made a claim, that they would be able to collect a one off ex-gratia payment within two weeks. The announcement was made during a Virtual Press Briefing held at the office of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries St. Lucia Avenue location.



A total of 381 motorists are slated to receive this one-off payment with the first disbursement made on May 27, 2020. As at June 3, 2020 the Commission has disbursed \$15.4million to 185 complainants.

Minister of State, Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture & Fisheries, Hon. Floyd Green speaking at the recent Virtual Press Briefing held at the Ministry's St Lucia office in Kingston on May 22, 2020. Moderator and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the CAC, Mr. Donovan White and CEO, CAC Mrs Dolsie Allen explained the process of what is titled **Bad Gas Payment**.

Petrojam Ethanol Limited (PEL) paid over J\$24.5 million to the Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC) on May 14, 2020 for disbursement to consumers who were affected. Only persons who would have submitted claims to the CAC which were reviewed by the Technical Committee will receive payment.

The payment is a sign of good faith by the Government for the affected motorists as based on investigations, neither the Government nor the PEL is liable for the incident.

### CONTACT

Contact will be made with complainants via telephone by officers of the Commission. This process has already started.

### KEEPING YOU Informed

Consumers who were approved for payment will be advised of the outcome of the assessment by the special committee. Consumers whose claims were not approved will also be contacted.

### SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT

Consumers who have been approved will be given an appointment time / date to come to an office of the Commission in order to sign the release and discharge document, provide a government ID for verification and to fill out a form with their banking details.

### MONEY TRANSFER

FUNDS WILL BE SENT ELECTRONICALLY to the bank account within two weeks once the documents are signed.

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# What do Consumers want from Stores in the COVID-19 Era?

## *Safety, Convenience and Empathy*

The spread of COVID-19 has quickly transformed how consumers shop, what they buy and what they want from vendors. And many say these new shopping habits will last long after the crisis has passed.

### **Better Health and Safety practices**

Consumers want shopping experiences that support social distancing and reduce the need to touch surfaces. Vendors that adopt in-store safety practices, including:

- altered store layouts to encourage social distancing;
- Sanitisation of trolleys, shelves and counter spaces; and,
- contactless payments at the point of sale.

In-store is not the only place where consumers want a safer experience. Consumers may prefer to purchase from businesses that offer contactless delivery. It is not expected that consumers' safety preferences will change much over the next six to nine months. This means that these new shopping options may become standard practices that change the baseline for consumer experience.

### **Consumers Expect to Shop Online More, Even After Lockdowns End**

Since the outbreak began, consumers have drastically reduced in-store visits. Meeting consumers' needs now requires an even greater focus on the e-commerce end-to-end customer experience. It also requires a new focus on fulfilment to support local pickup and delivery options. This is especially vital to the vulnerable consumer groups—over 65 and disabled consumers.

### **Consumers Want to Shop With Companies That Show Empathy**

Consumers want businesses to show empathy and a community-minded sense of purpose. Many companies already showcase their community involvement and support for various causes. Now, though, is the time to help with the response to the pandemic. For example, companies that have idle production lines can shift to producing essential medical supplies and equipment as was demonstrated when there was a shortage of alcohol.

E-commerce, inventory and fulfilment technology — plus ongoing awareness of consumer sentiment — are the keys to meeting consumer expectations now and for the foreseeable future. Adopting new tools and approaches amid a disruptive event can be a major challenge for organisations. However, rising to meet that challenge is the now the way forward for vendors, companies and the consumers they serve.



# Over 25 percent of consumers refused redress for faulty electrical appliances

Approximately 370 consumers were initially refused repairs, exchanges and refunds as it relates to faulty electrical equipment and appliances by vendors during the 2019/20 Financial Year. In addition, 312 consumers were refused redress as it relates to utilities; and another 277 were left out of pocket for a myriad of other services which includes finance, laundry, hair, medical and education.

This came to light based on the **1,645** complaints handled by the Consumer Affairs Commission during the 2019/20 Financial Year. The top three complaints categories were Electrical Equipment and Appliances 26.89%; Utilities 22.69% and Other Services 20.17%. However, with the Commission's intervention, **1,377** of the cases were resolved which resulted in refunds and compensation to consumers totalling **\$24.6 million** and a resolution rate of **83.70%**.



It should be noted that in terms of refunds/compensation, the top three categories were **Automotive \$9.1 million**; **Other Services (including finance, laundry, hair, medical, education) \$5.7 million**; and **Utility \$4 million**.

The Commission also responded to **654 requests for advice**.

Dolsie Allen, Chief Executive Officer at the Consumer Affairs Commission said, "Vendors must recognise their responsibilities to consumers. Consumers should not be left out of pocket because an item they have bought is faulty as stated in section 23 of the Consumer Protection Act". She also reminded consumers that, "It is important to understand your rights so you know when a retailer has to offer you a solution because when you purchase an item, it must be fit for purpose".

## COVID 19: MEAL PLANNING TIP

**Prior to shopping know exactly what is required on your shopping list.**



## COVID 19 Keeping our Elderly and Disabled Safe

**The Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC)**, recognises that Corona virus (COVID-19) is most harmful to the vulnerable in our society.

To protect our senior citizens and the disabled we will give them preferential treatment.

*Remember, hand rubbing,  
strong personal hygiene and social distancing.  
Help us curb the spread of the virus.*



# Price Gouging is a criminal offence!



The Honourable Floyd Green  
State Minister in the  
Ministry of Industry,  
Commerce, Agriculture and  
Fisheries

On March 25, 2020, the Houses of Parliament passed a resolution to combat alleged price gouging, brought by State Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, Honourable Floyd Green. The new measure which came into force on March 31, 2020, sought to prevent excessive price increases of goods during the period of a Declaration of a Disaster Area.

“Prices of these items would have already entailed a profit margin and as such, for the Disaster Area Order and time period, we are saying that the retailers have to maintain those prices” the Minister stated in his presentation. The Order; the Trade (Sale of Goods During Period of Declaration of Disaster Area) Order, 2020 details that no person whose business includes the retail sale of goods shall sell any necessary goods to another person at a price higher than the price charged immediately before the coming into force of the Disaster Risk Management (Declaration of Disaster Area) Order, 2020.

Under the Order, the Consumer Affairs Commission has been authorised to demand on behalf of the Minister, books, accounts or other documents relating to the business, to investigate claims of price gouging. “We meticulously reviewed our current legislative framework to identify the most effective approach to price gouging and the enforcement of penalties in a timely manner. This isn’t an issue that can be delayed, as people are experiencing it now and we can’t allow that,” he said.

Price gouging is when a seller increases the prices of goods, services or commodities to a level much higher than is considered reasonable or fair, and is considered exploitative in all the circumstances. “I am making another call for consumers to make a report to the Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC) where they are experiencing unreasonable increase in the price of goods. The CAC also has an App in the Playstore where complaints can be made as well. Let’s work together to protect each other as we tackle this COVID-19 crisis,” he asserted. The offender under the new Order can be held criminally liable to a fine not exceeding \$2 million dollars or to a term of imprisonment with or without hard labour not exceeding two years.

## Price Gouging vs. Price Increase

Price gouging is a situation where business take advantage of an external crisis to charge excessive prices for basic necessities – selling the goods significantly above their usual price.

An example of price gouging is an individuals who has been stock-piling hand-sanitiser and face masks to sell for inflated prices during the Coronavirus. These items are purchased at \$100 and resold for between \$700 and \$1400.

A price increase can be either economic, financial or strategic. However, generally, increased prices stem from a supplier raising prices on materials or finished goods; or both product and service sellers can experience increased fixed costs, such as building rental rates and utility fees. As business costs go up, companies must often adjust to maintain profitability.



# THE HURRICANE SEASON IS HERE!

## Are you prepared?

The annual 2020 Atlantic **hurricane season** begins on June 1 and ends on November 30. Don't wait until a hurricane watch is issued, to take certain precautions. The best time to start is now, before a threat of a weather event is imminent. Get through any hurricane emergency with less stress by preparing now.

Do make a thorough check of the roof of your house, hurricane shutters, hooks and latches. Repair where necessary.

Make sure that galvanized sheeting on the roof of your house is properly fastened.

Keep handy a supply of lumber, plywood, timber, etc. for battening down purposes.



Trim trees that touch power lines or hang over the house and other buildings.

### Consumer Alert!™

**Vendors: the price for goods must be clearly displayed on the item or shelf.**

The Consumer Protection Act Section 18 under Information to consumer states that the consumer must be provided: Where applicable, the origin, price in the currency of Jamaica, care terms, components, proper use, weight, size, instructions for assembly and installation of goods.; and where chargeable, the professional fees of the provider in respect of the goods. Failure to do so is an offence and a provider is liable on summary conviction before a Resident Magistrate to a fine not exceeding two hundred thousand dollars.



# Complaints Resolved



## ***You must be with us till the end!***

The complainant reported that she purchased items overseas and shipped them via the vendor. Upon collection, she realised that one package was missing. The vendor was contacted, who advised that she should send someone for it, which would be at her cost.

The CAC contacted the vendor regarding the complaint.

Following the CAC's intervention; a decision was made to have the package delivered to the complainant at no additional cost.

## ***Stand up for your rights!***

The complainant reported that he applied for landline service with installation three days later. The service worked for approximately 9 days and thereafter, it went. Several reports to the Utility company met with no response; so out of frustration, the complainant returned the equipment. Despite this, he was billed for months.

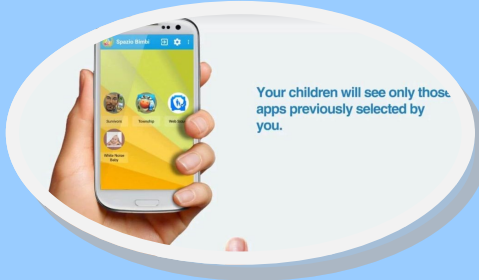
The Commission made contact with the vendor and following the intervention, the proper service was installed and the complainant received a rebate in the amount of **\$15,298.21**.



## ***Give me back my money!***

The complainant reported that she purchased a microwave stand and upon collecting the item and assembling same, it fell apart. She requested a refund but was refused and was offered store credit instead. The complainant was not in agreement. The CAC made contact with the vendor as the complainant was not interested in store credit and they did not have any more items of that type in stock. We were advised by the complainant that the vendor promised that new arrivals were expected later that month. This however did not materialise. The Commission in light of the foregoing, insisted on a full refund. This was granted in the amount of **\$8500.00**.

# Parents: Monitor children's devices



The Consumer Affairs Commission is urging parents to be more vigilant in monitoring the use of gadgets and digital media platforms by their children. This is due mainly to the increased usage of devices as classrooms have gone virtual, due to COVID 19. As a result, the opportunity to use social media has increased tremendously.

Mr. Andrew Evelyn, Information Technology Manager at the CAC notes that it is critical that parents monitor their children's gadgets and social media activities. This is against the background that children have been accessing social media even though it was originally designed for adults. Furthermore, the age requirement to access these sites has gradually been lowered over the years.

The IT Manager is therefore encouraging parents to consider limiting the amount of time spent on devices as a part of their monitoring process. He notes that it is the parents' responsibility to set time limits which specify how long children can use certain applications and the device itself. Mr. Evelyn is also recommending parental control of software as one method of monitoring the devices used by children as they automatically block usage once the time limit is up; increase safety and limit exposure to dangerous persons or software. Among the parental control apps he recommends are: Kaftersky Safe Kids, Google Family Link, Qustodio and Norton Family.

Parents are also being advised to have times and places at home that devices are discouraged from being used, to ensure their children have a balanced life.

## COVID 19 Keeping Our Consumers Safe

**The Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC)**, recognises the threat that Corona virus (COVID-19) continues to pose to all Jamaicans. The well-being of our valued consumers and employees is also of the deepest concern to us. We encourage you to follow the best practice protocols from the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Help us protect you and your families.



**Prior to entering the building:**

**Wear a mask covering your nose and mouth.**

*You may be asked to lower the mask for identification purposes.*



**As you enter, sanitise your hands.**

***Remember, hand rubbing,  
strong personal hygiene and social distancing.  
Help us curb the spread of the virus.***





# HEALTHY SUMMER EATING

## JAMAICAN PINEAPPLE DRINK

In this traditional Jamaican drink recipe sugar, lime, and ginger are added to water that has been boiled with pineapple skins and then chilled. Next time you peel a pineapple, save the skin and make this refreshing pineapple drink.

### Ingredients

- 1 pineapple (use peeled skin only)
- 1 1/4 cup of sugar
- 6 green limes
- 1 finger of ginger
- 5 cups of water.



### Instructions

1. Wash the pineapple well with water before you peel. Peel the pineapple.
2. Boil the pineapple's skin in 5 cups hot water for 8 to 12 minutes.
3. Let the water cool and then blend with skins until smooth.
4. Strain the mixture a couple of times using a spoon to press the liquid from the blended mixture through the strainer and into a clean bowl. Discard the pressed residue each time you strain.
5. Add the rest of the ingredients and stir.
6. Refrigerate until it is cold.

**Serve with ice.**

## COCONUT LIME WATERMELON SLUSHIE

### Ingredients

- 4 cups frozen watermelon
- 1 medium lime (juiced)
- 1/3 cup light coconut milk
- 1/2 cup watermelon juice (plus more to ease blending or use coconut water)
- 1 Tbsp. sweetener of choice (optional maple syrup or honey)



### Instructions

Halve a ripe seedless watermelon and scoop out rounded tablespoons (or cube with a knife). Arrange on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Freeze until firm - about 3-4 hours.

Use other half of watermelon: Blend pieces on high, adding a tip of water if needed, until completely smooth and pureed.

**OPTIONAL:** Drape a large, thin dish towel over a mixing bowl and pour over juice. Then gather corners, lift up and squeeze the juice out leaving the pulp behind - there shouldn't be much, but this makes the juice extra smooth. Transfer to a mason jar, cover, and refrigerate - should keep for 3-4 days, or more.

Take frozen watermelon add coconut milk, lime juice, and watermelon juice. Blend on low speed until creamy and smooth. Scrape down the sides and repeat low blending. If needed, add a bit more watermelon juice, but not too much or it will become too thin.

Once the slushie is blended and smooth, taste and adjust flavour as needed. Add more coconut milk for creaminess, lime for brightness, sweetener of choice to sweeten. Blend and sample again - repeat as needed.

Serve in empty watermelon rinds you would have saved or chilled serving glasses and decorate with a lime wedge.

This recipe serves two (2) generously. Best when fresh!

**TIP:** Freeze leftovers in Popsicle moulds or make your own with disposable cups and popsicle sticks from the craft store. Cheers!

## CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMISSION

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