

The Cybertool for FraudBusters

Consumer Sentinel is an essential tool for local, state and federal law enforcement officials. Law enforcers, using a restricted access website, can see the hundreds of thousands of consumer complaints in Consumer Sentinel to spot trends and build cases against scam artists.

Consumer Sentinel allows agencies to investigate allegations that cross jurisdictional boundaries. It is often very difficult for law enforcement officers to pursue complaints against rip-off artists operating across state lines or even national borders. By accessing complaints in Consumer Sentinel, local, state, federal and international law enforcers can build more effective cases to shut down cross-border frauds.

Consumer Sentinel works to fight fraud. Consumer Sentinel has been instrumental in hundreds of successful enforcement actions in the United States and Canada. These actions have returned millions of dollars to fraud victims in the United States and abroad.

Accessing complaints in Consumer Sentinel is fast, easy and free. So is joining Consumer Sentinel. Contact the Consumer Sentinel project team toll-free at **1.877.701.9595** or at **sentinel@ftc.gov** for more information about how to join. The Consumer Sentinel public website, **www.consumer.gov/sentinel**, offers more information about how law enforcers use Sentinel to report and access complaints to fight fraud.

Consumer Sentinel: The Cybertool for FraudBusters. When you use Consumer Sentinel, you have access to hundreds of thousands of consumer fraud complaints. If you enter complaints into Sentinel, you make those complaints available to every law enforcer who uses Sentinel. That information is the key to effectively prosecuting rip-off artists—including those who prey on consumers in your community.

Suspect a scam? Use Consumer Sentinel to investigate fraud complaints.

Consumer Sentinel is a secure, online cybertool and complaint database used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the United States and abroad. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Canada's PhoneBusters, the Better Business Bureaus, the Federal Trade Commission and many other organizations have entered Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Sentinel. You can use Consumer Sentinel to help protect your community from fraud. It offers a variety of tools to facilitate investigations and prosecutions, including:

- electronic alerts about particular companies and practices
- information to help agencies coordinate effective joint action
- an index of audiotapes of fraudulent telemarketing sales pitches
- analysis of fraud trends

“Consumer Sentinel is more than a database of consumer complaints. It also offers Internet resources, references telemarketing statutes across the country, gives sample litigation documents, and generates a data clearinghouse on identity theft. The Texas Office of the Attorney General has used each of these Consumer Sentinel features and found each one helpful in our work.”

– Kirsten Niedzwecki, chief investigator for the Texas Office of the Attorney General.



For more information about how Consumer Sentinel helps law enforcers report and access complaints to fight fraud, visit the public website of Consumer Sentinel www.consumer.gov/sentinel, or call toll-free, 1.877.701.9595.

The Cybertool for FraudBusters

Use Consumer Sentinel's Identity Theft Data Clearinghouse.

Consumer Sentinel's Identity Theft Data Clearinghouse is the nation's repository for identity theft complaints. Created under the Identity Theft and Assumption Deterrence Act of 1998, it began operation in 1999. The FTC established the Identity Theft Toll-Free Hotline, **1.877.IDTHEFT (1.877.438.4338)**, and the ID Theft Website, www.consumer.gov/idtheft, to give identity theft victims **one** place to report their problems and receive helpful information.

- The Clearinghouse, an integrated part of the Consumer Sentinel system, contains more than 70,000 complaints to date. This information provides law enforcement agencies with a broad range of complaints and helps them spot patterns of illegal activity.
- The information lets policymakers know the extent of identity theft and how it happens (e.g., credit card vs. loan fraud, etc.).
- The information helps private organizations better protect consumers from identity theft.

Spot It.

Report It.

Solve It.

The Federal Trade Commission Working For The Consumer

The FTC works **For The Consumer** to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint, or to get free information on a wide range of consumer topics, call toll-free, **1.877.FTC.HELP (1.877.382.4357)**, or visit www.ftc.gov.

TOP COMPLAINT CATEGORIES*◀

- Investment Scams
- Business Opportunities and Work-at-Home Plans
- Prizes, Sweepstakes and Lotteries
- Travel, Vacation and Timeshare Schemes
- Pyramid Plans and Chain Letters
- Internet Services and Computer Complaints
- Internet Auctions
- Advance-Fee Loans and Credit Cons
- Health Claims
- Magazine and Buyers Club Deals

*Excludes identity theft complaints.

How Consumer Sentinel helps fight fraud.

The earliest leads in a recent joint crack-down prosecuted by the FTC and eight states came from the Consumer Sentinel complaint database. The FTC and the states succeeded in shutting down Equinox International Corp., a pyramid scheme, for defrauding consumers of more than \$200 million. Maryland law enforcement officials used Consumer Sentinel to get instant e-mail messages about Equinox complaints for its investigation. A final settlement requires the dissolution of Equinox and several related companies and provides for redress to consumers.



www.consumer.gov/sentinel