



BUREAU OF ELECTRONIC & APPLIANCE REPAIR,
HOME FURNISHINGS & THERMAL INSULATION

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**GUIDE TO ELECTRONIC
& APPLIANCE REPAIR**



Virtually all California households have electronic equipment and major appliances. Besides necessities such as refrigerators and ranges, many Californians have personal computers, video equipment, televisions, and other electronics. Technology is changing rapidly, and new products are introduced every year, but even state-of-the-art equipment and appliances can eventually need repairs.

This brochure explains how the California Department of Consumer Affairs' Bureau of Electronic and Appliance Repair, Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation (BEARHFTI) protects the public by regulating electronic and appliance repair dealers and service contract providers. It also offers tips for consumers seeking repairs, as well as tips on purchasing appliances and electronic equipment.

What BEARHFTI regulates

Service contract providers

BEARHFTI has jurisdiction over the sale and administration of service contracts for a variety of products. Although a store salesperson may sell you a service contract, the contracts are often administered by another company. A company that sells or administers service contracts must be registered with BEARHFTI.

Before buying a service contract, be sure to fully evaluate the costs and benefits of the service contract and read the fine print. Compare the coverage to what's provided by the product warranty. Know your right to cancel the service contract. For more details, check out *A Consumer Guide to Service Contracts* online at www.bearhfti.ca.gov or request a copy by calling (800) 952-5210.

Electronic and appliance repair dealers

The Electronic and Appliance Repair Dealer Registration Law covers electronic equipment and major home appliances normally used or sold for personal, family, household, or home-office use.

Major home appliances covered include:

- Washers and dryers, dishwashers, and trash compactors.
- Refrigerators and freezers, ranges, microwave and conventional ovens.
- Portable or window air conditioners.

Home electronic products covered include:

- Personal computers, televisions, stereo equipment, radios, audio or video recorders or playback equipment.
- Video cameras, video games, telephone answering devices, antennas (including satellite equipment).
- Photocopiers, fax machines, car stereo equipment and car anti-theft alarms.

Installation of:

- Car stereo equipment and anti-theft alarms.
- Residential antennas (including satellite equipment).



BEARHFTI serves consumers through:

Complaint resolution – A representative from BEARHFTI or DCA's Complaint Resolution Program will work with the consumer and the repair dealer, and may recommend informal adjustments, and attempt to mediate a voluntary settlement of the complaint.

Investigation – In cases involving serious or ongoing violations of the law, undercover investigations are conducted to verify suspected fraud, negligence, or incompetence.

Enforcement – BEARHFTI has a number of enforcement tools to protect consumers and take appropriate disciplinary actions.



Tips on purchasing electronic equipment and appliances

Before you buy

- Research the product to find the best value.
- Find out how long the product is covered under the warranty, what parts and services are covered, and what you must do to maintain the warranty.
- Ask who will perform warranty repairs on the product. **Caution:** Don't try to repair the item yourself or take it to an unauthorized repair facility. Doing so can void your warranty.
- If you decide to buy a service contract, find out exactly what it covers.

After you buy

Carefully read the instruction manual and follow its recommendations for use, care, cleaning, and maintenance. If you lose the owner's manual, contact the manufacturer for another copy.

Before seeking repairs

You may save yourself a service call by checking these simple items if your product fails to operate:

- Is the cord plugged in? Is the start control fully in the "on" position?
- Is there a reset button or some other device that will get the unit back in operation? Are there any loose connections? Is the electric outlet working?

If you have a problem with a repair

If a problem develops, try to work it out with the repair shop dealer or service technician. If you can't resolve it, or if it is a warranty problem, write or call the manufacturer and explain the details of your problem. If you are still not satisfied, please contact BEARHFTI.

If you believe a repair dealer has not provided appropriate services, you can file a complaint with the Bureau. Visit the Bureau's Web site, www.bearhfti.ca.gov, to file online or to download a complaint form. You can also call **(800) 952-5210** to have a complaint form mailed to you.

What to do when seeking repairs

Finding a reputable repair shop

- Get referrals from family, friends, or coworkers.
- Check online at www.bearhfti.ca.gov to find out if the dealer has a valid registration.
- Get a written estimate for any service or repair BEFORE the work is performed.
- Find out if a diagnosis fee will be charged if the item is not repaired.

Know what to expect

The law requires service dealers to:

- Inform the consumer in writing when a diagnosis fee will be charged and the amount of the fee.
- Provide a written estimate of the total repair cost to the consumer.
- Furnish an itemized invoice of all labor performed and parts installed when the repair is complete.
- Return all replaced parts to the consumer (except those exempted by regulation).
- Perform all repairs competently.

Check for proper registration

Each location of every business that repairs or accepts products for repair, or that sells or administers service contracts, is required to be registered with BEARHFTI.

Dealers must display the registration in their shops. Consumers can verify current registration, or view a list of registered dealers in their area, by going online to www.bearhfti.ca.gov. Each subcontractor who performs repairs or installations must also be registered.

BEARHFTI protects consumers, and protects registered repair dealers from unlawful competition, by enforcing these registration requirements. BEARHFTI learns about unregistered repair dealers from:

- Consumer complaints, statewide random inspections, and anonymous tips.
- Review of telephone directories, Internet sites, and local newspaper advertisements.

Know your rights

The Electronic and Appliance Repair Dealer Registration Law prohibits:

- False or misleading advertising.
- Fraud or dishonest dealing.
- False promises likely to induce the consumer to authorize repairs.
- Willful departure from accepted trade standards.
- Negligence or incompetence in repairs.

