

DEDEA brings key Consumer Protection Bodies to the Cacadu Community

In a clear move to tackle the consumer issues head on and ensure the ultimate vigilance from all the stakeholders involved and affected by consumer commotion, the Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs (DEDEA) brought the relevant key institutions to paint the current consumer's picture and alert both the business and the consumers about their responsibilities in this regard.

The department invited the National Credit Regulator (NCR) and Legal Aid Board in the Consumer Rights Seminar and World Consumer Rights Day Celebrations held in Port Elizabeth and Hummansdorp on the 13th and 14th respectively. The seminar was held under the theme "Employee Financial Wellness is Business Wellness". Speaking in the seminar, Senior Manager at DEDEA, Mr Tandi Gcilitshana urged the business and departments to exercise more caution when processing some of the emolument orders forwarded to them by the debt collectors. In this regard, the seminar moved for a training of payroll managers and officers to ensure the scrutinisation of these orders. "This is after we have observed a trend where debt collectors completely disregard the law when writing some of these emolument orders. Sometimes the interests attached to these debts are ridiculous and more money will be added to the debt without proper explanation given to the alleged debtor" added Tandi.

Mr. Kagiso Kgasi who is the legal Advisor at NCR echoed Mr Gcilitshana's sentiments and added that the current picture is not looking good as the consumers are getting more and more indebted. This was attributed to bad business/ marketing practices and this is given thrust by negligence on the part of consumers. Kagiso said as things stands there is R1,1 trillion consumer credit to households and 65 000 judgments past for debts every month in South Africa.

On the 14th March 2009, the department, accompanied by NCR took its campaign to the masses in Hummansdorp where the second aspect of the drive, that is, encouraging responsible consumption was activated. Speaking in the World Consumer Rights Celebrations, the MEC of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs, Phumulo Masualle said those debt collectors who confiscate debtors Identity Documents are in fact breaking the law. It is simple demeaning and infringing on your rights if one just takes your ID simple because you owe him/her money. In fact, it is also illegal for you to be surrendering it to anyone other than when required by law enforcement agencies for purely the purpose of identification as required by circumstances at the time.

Both the business fraternity and the consumers appreciated the initiative by the department with some assertions made by all stakeholders' present and particular advices given to consumers.

In the seminar, the following assertions were made:

- There is a urgent need for an integrated comprehensive strategy on how to deal with the consumer issues

- This should be complimented by an equally targeted programme to deal with the issues identified in the strategy.
- Training of pay roll managers and officers
- An need for partnerships by all stakeholders including the media to drive the message home
- A call for a provincial summit that will lump all the issues raised in different areas and platforms and elevate them to a higher level.
- There was also a call for more resources to drive all these commitments.

In the celebrations people were urged to slow down on buying with credit as much as possible, stopping completely will be even more advisable still. If one has to buy on credit, she/he must be as vigilant as one can in the form of reading the contracts thoroughly before signing that and when not sure one must seek for advice.

“People must avoid default judgments, emolument orders, impulsive buying and when they do buy on credit; they must honour all their credit commitments” advised Mr. Gcilitshana.

The business and the general public acknowledged and appreciated the initiative taken by DEDEA conceding that indebtedness affects all of them as “one can only be productive when he/she is happy and that indebtedness brings a lot of unhappiness”.

Some of the stakeholders who attended the seminar include Ford, Nandos, Shoprite, Good Year, SATU, Popcru, Women Against Women Abuse, NMBM, and Liquor Board.