

Feature

Whistleblowing: new service launched for consumers in France

On 25 March 2019, the French General Directorate of Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control (Direction Générale de la Concurrence, de la Consommation et de la Répression des Fraudes, “DGCCRF”) published its activity report for 2018. As part of the drive by DGCCRF to better inform consumers, the report mentioned the launch of a new mobile app and website¹ – called “SignalConso” – to allow consumers to notify problems encountered in stores and restaurants.

How Signalconso Works

The “SignalConso” mobile app and website were first launched on an experimental basis in December 2018 in one region of France (Centre-Val de Loire). Since then, the experiment has been extended to two other regions: Occitanie and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. It should be extended to all French territories by the end of 2019.

Currently, the whistleblowing public service only targets physical retail stores and restaurants. In the future, its scope will also cover online shops and products purchased online.

Consumers can notify DGCCRF about various issues, including hygiene practices, quality of food stuffs, recalled products still available, false or missing information, incorrect prices or prices not being displayed.

Some of the problems that consumers encounter – such as dangerous products, adverse effects on health and food poisoning – require special analysis by DGCCRF and, consequently, are outside SignalConso’s scope. A specific form must be filed to notify DGCCRF in those cases.

The new whistleblowing service has three stages:

First, the consumer must complete a form and provide their contact information (name and email address), as well as detailed information about the issue they encountered and the store or restaurant involved.

Next, provided the notification they’ve received is valid, DGCCRF will inform the store or restaurant. If they take the necessary measures to solve the problem, they will not face any sanction. If a consumer has expressly agreed (in the notification form) to have their contact information disclosed, the store or restaurant can contact them directly to keep them informed of progress.

The notification is recorded in DGCCRF’s database. DGCCRF may decide to launch an investigation if frequent and/or serious notifications are received for a particular store or restaurant.

Comment

Consumer associations are already very active in France. Their members will be further empowered by this easy-to-use tool, which is likely to be used frequently. Companies operating in France should closely monitor the SignalConso service and promptly address any notifications to mitigate the risk of investigations being triggered by DGCCRF.

In the coming months, as this experiment is extended to other territories and sectors, it should be possible to make a provisional assessment determining whether the tool has resulted in any multiplication and/or reinforcement of DGCCRF’s investigations.

¹ <https://signalconso.beta.gouv.fr/>



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