
Food Safety Represents One Of Urgent Problems For Armenian Consumers.

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International Day of Consumer Rights Protection is celebrated on March 15. Abgar Eghoyan, Chairman of Consumer Rights Protection NGO, told NT correspondent that former US President John Kennedy was the first to speak about the coordinated principles of consumer rights on March 15, 1962. It was the start of the movement for consumer rights, which later was reflected in a UN declaration.

According to A. Eghoyan, food safety is one of the urgent problems that concern Armenian consumers. "Old and faked foodstuffs, as well as those without certificates, with wrong marking can be found on the domestic market," he said.

In the opinion of A. Eghoyan, this is conditioned by the fact that the economic competition field is not equal for all economic entities selling food.

Particularly, some foodstuffs "may be sold in streets or fairs without cheques and tax paid, or may be sold in supermarkets with observation of all rules."

As progress in the field of consumer rights protection, A. Eghoyan pointed out the fact that in accordance with a decision of the Armenian government, since early 2007, 40 foodstuffs have been sold with marking in the Armenian language, while starting from July, all foodstuffs sold must have such marking.

He said that it is also an instrument in fight against shadow economy because shadow import is done by economic entities, which have no agreements with producers and cannot ensure Armenian marking for imported goods.

Another improvement is expected in mid 2007. A. Eghoyan said that their organization has developed a draft order of confiscation and utilization of dangerous food. It is envisaged that the Armenian government will approve it in the second half of June 2007. It will rule out sale of dangerous food by the respective structures. "It is important that destruction of dangerous foodstuffs will be done at the expense of unscrupulous sellers, as a result of which neither budget nor consumers will suffer," he noted.

A. Eghoyan also considered important to protect rights of consumers making use of public services. In his words, it is the most monopolized sector, where in the recent years prices of gas supply, water supply and sewerage, telecommunication services have grown without quality improvement. The NGO considers important to cooperate with the RA Public Services Regulatory Commission for development of rules of service provision, as well as to organize works on information, advice of consumers and protection of their rights at various instances. Particularly, posters about existence of the Consumer Rights Protection NGO's hot line for users of 4 public services are at all 1,100 post-offices of Haypost.

Since August 2006, the organization has received about 500 alarm calls, since early 2007 - over 200. 80-90% of problems raised as a result of these calls have been solved. "We work with supplying organizations, and if they do not solve problems or issues demand coordinated approach, we cooperate with the RA Public Services Regulatory Commission," A. Eghoyan noted.

There are other two Armenian organizations operating in the field of consumer rights protection.
