

Verein für Konsumenteninformation (VKI)

Austrian Consumers' Association

VKI, the Austrian Consumers' Association, is a non-profit organisation which was founded on March 21, 1961. Our mission is to represent and strengthen consumer interest by informing and educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities. VKI has a long tradition in testing goods and services in an unbiased way. The results are published in our monthly magazine KONSUMENT.

VKI is based in Vienna. Our information centres in Vienna and Innsbruck offer help and dispute resolution services to consumers. VKI also undertakes court cases on behalf either of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection or the Federal Chamber of Labour.

Members of the VKI are the Austrian Chamber of Labour and the Austrian Labour Union Federation. A further special member is the Republic of Austria, which is represented by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection. VKI acts in different national institutions as the consumers' spokesperson. We are a member of Consumers International (CI), the World Federation of Consumers Group, and BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation

How is VKI funded?

To a large extent VKI is self-funded (mainly by selling its monthly magazine KONSUMENT and other publications). The members of VKI – and also the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection – pay an annual subsidy. In 2013 this subsidy amounted to 2.5 million EUR.

In order not to compromise our independence we do not carry any advertisements in our publications.

Testing: What is being investigated?

VKI has a long tradition in testing consumer goods. Every year we carry out more than 100 comparative product tests and investigations of services from nearly all areas of everyday life. With regard to products, investigations are carried out for example in the areas of consumer electronics, energy, food, health, household appliances, IT and telecommunications. Service investigations deal with finances (e.g. insurance products, retirement provisions and savings), health and car repair.

Before each investigation, a range of products or services is selected. This choice is based on aspects such as market importance, technical features and price. The investigations are partly carried out by our staff members, partly by external testing facilities. Test samples are purchased anonymously in shops and not provided by the manufacturers. Many investigations are carried out in cooperation with foreign partners, for example with the German consumer organisation Stiftung Warentest.

- Tests of products and food: These tests consist of a technical and a practical part where – depending on the tested product – different applicable characteristics are assessed. The technical tests cover e.g. usability, environmental compatibility, chemical composition. In the practical part amateurs and experts evaluate e.g.

easy handling, convenience, appearance, smell and taste. The different parameters are “weighed according to their significance” and the result is a ranking on a 5-step scale. The classification of the evaluation result is based on the marking system used in Austrian schools.

- Comparative service tests: The comparison of product quality is often not enough. Information before purchase and the service afterwards is also of importance. As it is difficult to compare services, some important criteria are defined in advance when tested.
- Tests of market and price: Sometimes it is more suitable to give a complete overview of the range of products on the market than to look at single products – especially when there are many almost identical products or if their difference in quality is negligible or if price and equipment correlate closely.
- Ethics & CSR testing: VKI was the first consumer organisation worldwide that started CSR testing. Since 2000 we inform not only about product attributes but also about production conditions of goods and services.

Publications & Downloads

KONSUMENT. Product tests and service investigations are published in our magazine KONSUMENT. It was first launched in 1961. KONSUMENT appears monthly and costs 5.0 EUR (annual subscription: 52 EUR). In 2014 KONSUMENT had 53.400 subscribers, 53.300 single copies were sold at retail outlets. KONSUMENT is economically independent and doesn't contain advertising.

Konsument.at. All articles published in KONSUMENT since 1999 can be downloaded at www.konsument.at. The website also features the latest consumer news and exclusive fast-track tests of products from discounter chains. Downloading information costs 5 EUR per day or 25 EUR per year.

Books. VKI publishes approximately ten books per year, dealing with topics such as consumer rights, health and medicine, IT, nutrition, money and insurance.

Process guiding: How we enforce consumers' rights

VKI helps to enforce collective consumer rights and takes legal action if necessary. By assuming liability for legal costs, and thus leading and winning important test cases, VKI plays a central role in the protection of consumers' rights. VKI is also officially entitled to fight against illegal practices like misleading advertising by filing injunctions.

- Test cases: VKI helps consumers by taking the full risk of legal costs of a court proceeding. The focus is on individual cases where the cost risk hinders consumers in the pursuit of their claims – especially if they do not have legal expenses insurance. The litigation cost risk could be ten times higher than the sum in dispute. However, any judgement is legally binding only for the parties to the test case proceedings. In other, similar cases, the judgment constitutes only a non-binding precedent.
- Action for injunction: VKI as a qualified entity under directive 2009/22/EC (“Injunctions Directive”) is entitled to file injunctive actions, in its own name, against unfair and illegal standard contract terms, noncompliance with consumer protection standards as well as unfair commercial practices.
- Collective redress action under Austrian law: The Austrian Civil Proceedings Code currently does not provide for class-action tort litigation. As an alternative tool to support consumers getting access to justice, VKI developed a specific form of collective redress action based on Austrian law in 2001: A large group of consumers hand over their claims to an association that is entitled to bring representative actions to court.

For further details and court rulings go to: www.verbraucherrecht.at.

Consumer Advisory Centres: Where to get help

VKI also hosts advisory centres in Vienna and Innsbruck. There we provide specific target-group information in order to support consumers in making adequate and informed choices and in recognising their rights. Moreover, we offer dispute resolution and lectures for schools.

Our counselling service covers consumers' rights in general with a special focus on the financial sector. Part of the service is free, in case of complex problems we charge a token fee of 15 EUR.

ECC Austria: Troubles abroad – help at home

The European Consumer Centre Austria (ECC Austria) is one of 30 European Consumers Centres (ECC-Net) and is hosted by VKI. ECC-Net offers consumers free legal advice and assistance in every EU country as well as Norway and Iceland. Its mission is to inform and assist consumers in case of crossborder complaints and to reach out of court settlements. The ECC-Net also provides information and advice when shopping across Europe.

Contact Us

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