

Three collection agencies and two repeat offenders make Better Business Bureau's bad list

The Better Business Bureau today announced its annual "Dirty Dozen" list of area businesses with the most unanswered and unresolved complaints in 2014. Last year, consumers filed 13,642 complaints with BBB against businesses in the Southern Piedmont area of N.C. and S.C. "In 2014, BBB resolved a record-high 91 percent of complaints because the majority of businesses worked with their customers and with us to address customer issues," said BBB President Tom Bartholomy. "Unfortunately though, there are businesses that don't respond to resolve complaints at all, and those businesses are the ones that have made our Dirty Dozen list."

Three of the twelve companies with the most unanswered and unresolved complaints are collection agencies that specialize in collecting payday loans taken out online. "Payday lending is a brand new market for debt collectors," said Bartholomy, "but the debt collectors are still required to adhere to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act."

"Two businesses on BBB's 2014 Dirty Dozen list are 'repeat offenders' that have made previous years' Dirty Dozen lists," said Bartholomy. "When companies don't respond to or resolve complaints, they usually don't stay in business very long because consumers are doing their homework and checking businesses out. However, some business owners like Randy Briel, repeatedly change their company name and use aliases to make it difficult for consumers to find out about their complaint record."

The top 12 businesses with the most unanswered or unresolved complaints from January 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014 are:

- Indoor Air Quality (BBB Grade F) – With an unknown address, Indoor Air Quality has 18 unanswered and unresolved complaints in 2014 and 63 total complaints in the last 36 months. Complainants allege that the company set up appointments for low cost air duct cleaning and then charged a higher amount than originally quoted, sold services the homeowner didn't need or failed to perform warranty work. The company is also using BBB logo claiming to be a BBB Accredited Business without authorization. Indoor Air Quality has used 8 different business names and it appears that this company has intentionally piggybacked on the name awareness and recognition of other air duct cleaning businesses locally. Another company, Indoor Air Quality, Inc. in Kannapolis, is owned by Edward Anthony, has an A+ rating and is Accredited by BBB.
- God Bless the USA, Inc. (BBB Grade F) – Complainants allege that this Indian Trail-based waste collection service billed them after they had cancelled their service or the company failed to perform work as expected. God Bless the USA had seven unanswered and unresolved complaints in 2014 and 14 total complaints in the last 36 months.
- Pro Group/Randy Briel (BBB Grade F) - Complainants allege that Waxhaw-based, home improvement contractor Randy Briel failed to complete work after being paid or did not finish contracted work. Briel has used 21 business names, 20 phone numbers, 18 addresses and 5 aliases. He has multiple criminal convictions related to obtaining money under false pretense and he has an upcoming court date in Union County on Feb. 5, 2015 for obtaining money by false pretense. Briel has seven unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and 67 total complaints dating back to 2000, with victims in seven counties in N.C. (Mecklenburg, Union, Lincoln, Gaston, Cabarrus, Catawba and Iredell), and two counties in S.C. (York and Richland). He is also a REPEAT OFFENDER on BBB's Dirty Dozen list.
- Bainbridge Crew of NC, Inc. (BBB Grade F) – Based in Charlotte, Bainbridge Crew is a home improvement contractor. Complainants allege that the company failed to complete contracts on a timely basis. Bainbridge Crew has six unresolved complaints and 19 total complaints in the last 36 months.
- Berkeley Hughes & Associates, LLC (BBB Grade F) – Based in Charlotte, this collection agency is one of three collection agencies that made BBB's Dirty Dozen list. "The recession caused many people to default on debts and now, business is booming for collection agencies," said Bartholomy. Consumers allege that Berkeley, Hughes & Associates is violating the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act by using hostile and threatening techniques. The company has six unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and six total complaints in the last 36 months.
- Barron, Gibson & Phillips, LLC (BBB Grade F) – Complainants from 19 states allege that this Charlotte collection agency is using questionable practices to collect old debts that may violate the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and the statute of limitations on collections. Complainants allege that they were threatened with being arrested if they didn't make immediate payment. Barron, Gibson & Phillips has five unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and 41 total complaints in the last 36 months.
- Docks Plus, Inc. (BBB Grade F) - Complainants allege that this Cornelius-based marine contractor failed to complete contracts as expected or in a timely manner. Docks Plus has five unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and eight total complaints in the last 36 months.
- Flybystore.com (BBB Grade F) – Based in Charlotte, Flybystore.com sells uniforms and accessories to airline employees. Complainants from 12 states allege that they ordered airline crew uniforms, luggage or tags that were not delivered in a timely manner. Complainants also allege difficulty in receiving refunds or the company was slow to provide refunds. The company has five unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and 13 total complaints in the last 36 months.
- M&P Roofing Specialists (BBB Grade F) - Complainants allege that this Hickory-based roofing company failed to complete contracts as expected or in a timely manner. The company has five unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and 16 total complaints in the last 36 months.
- PDL Recovery Services (BBB Grade F) - Charlotte-based PDL Recovery Services is a debt collector that specializes in collecting payday loans taken out online. PDL Recovery Services has five unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and 28 total complaints in the last 36 months. Complainants from 19 states allege that PDL collectors used harassing and threatening tactics in possible violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act which included: 1) calling repeatedly, 2) contacting their employers to tell them that the person is going to be arrested, and 3) impersonating law enforcement personnel. Complainants also allege that PDL did not provide requested documentation to prove that the debt was valid. "With payday lending barred in many states including N.C., payday lenders have set up shop on the Internet where business is booming," said Bartholomy. "Instead of driving across the state line to Fort Mill or Gaffney to get a payday loan, consumers are going online."
- Austin Outdoor Exclusives, Inc. (BBB Grade F) – Based in Charlotte, Austin Outdoor Exclusives sells hunting and fishing products. Complainants allege that they ordered products (tree stands used for hunting) from the company which the company failed to deliver. Complainants also allege difficulty in obtaining refunds. The company has four unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and 26 total complaints in the last 36 months.
- D & C Tree Service (BBB Grade F) - Complainants from Southeast Charlotte and Union County hired this Wingate-based company to provide tree services and/or stump removal and they allege that the company failed to complete the contract after being paid. D&C Tree Service has four unanswered or unresolved complaints in 2014 and seven total complaints in the last 36 months.

"The easiest way that consumers can protect themselves against bad businesses is to check a company out with BBB, before they sign a contract," said Bartholomy. "It's fast, easy and free." Consumers can check out businesses online at www.bbb.org or they can call BBB (toll-free in NC and SC) at 1-877-317-7236.

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