

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

More Than Once Upon a Mattress: Used Bedding Labeling Rules

Washington, DC — Buying a mattress? Factors to consider may include soft or firm, innerspring or foam, *new or used*. Used? Yes, in most parts of the country, used mattresses can be resold as long as they meet certain labeling and processing requirements.

Bedding can be expensive. It's important to know what you're buying. The easiest way to tell if you're buying new or used is to look at the label attached to the mattress. In most cases, *new mattresses* will include a white tag or label that indicates that the mattress contains "all new materials, consisting of..." Depending on the state, *used mattresses* may contain a tag, sometimes red or yellow in color, that warns that the mattress contains used materials. Federal law requires that any mattress that contains used stuffing bear a tag or label with that information. If you don't see *any* tag, consider doing business with another retailer. Otherwise, you simply don't know what you're buying.

Not all states have labeling requirements for the sale of used mattresses, and for those that do, the requirements can vary. For example, in many places, old mattresses that have been recovered with new ticking (strong, tightly woven cotton or linen fabric) can be sold as long as they are sanitized or disinfected in some way before sale. In other states, only certain parts of mattresses, such as the springs, can be reused. These rules apply to traditional retailers as well as to thrift, secondhand and consignment shops.

Mattress Shopping Tips:

- ✓ Shop around. Mattress prices and quality vary greatly.
- ✓ Ask if the retailer sells *used* bedding. If so, and you want a new mattress, make sure your mattress has a "new" mattress tag.
- ✓ Make sure you look at the tag on the actual mattress you're buying, either *before* you leave the store or *before* the delivery person leaves your house. Don't let the heavy plastic wrapping stop you from looking for — and at — the tag.
- ✓ Ask the retailer to write "new" on your sales receipt if you've been told you're buying a new mattress. If it turns out that the mattress is used, you'll have stronger recourse.
- ✓ Avoid retailers with mattresses that don't carry tags. You simply don't know what you're getting, regardless of what the salesperson claims. It's what's in writing that counts.
- ✓ Ask about the retailer's return and refund policies, and get copies in writing.

For More Information

The agency that regulates mattress labeling varies by state. To find out what the bedding laws are in your state, you may have to contact the State Departments of Health, Consumer Affairs, Agriculture or Licensing.

The Federal Trade Commission can answer your questions about federal labeling requirements. Contact the Consumer Response Center by phone: toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: 202-326-2502; by mail: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20580; or through the Internet, using the online complaint form at www.ftc.gov. Although the Commission cannot resolve individual problems for consumers, it can act against a company if it sees a pattern of possible law violations.

The FTC publishes free brochures on a variety of consumer issues. For a complete list of publications, ask the CRC for a copy of **Best Sellers**, or visit us online at www.ftc.gov — click on Consumer Protection.

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