

In the Committee's view, the goals of prevention and enforcement are complementary. Programs designed to prevent misleading advertising will not have their desired impact if enforcement is weak. On the other hand, prevention and education should reduce the number of violations and so make available more resources to investigate and resolve the cases which do arise. While the Committee does not believe that at this time available funding is so low as to hinder enforcement, it would caution against future budget reductions which might limit the scope or availability of current programs.

B. Information and Education

The Committee heard a considerable amount of evidence on the need to educate consumers and the business community about our laws on misleading advertising. Several witnesses commented on the lack of information available to consumers and the fact that they do not appear to be well-informed about what constitutes misleading advertising or how to deal with related problems. For example, Mr. Edward Belobaba suggested that consumers do not know what the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs does and are virtually unaware of any consumer protection rights.⁵

The Consumers' Association of Canada (CAC) is of the view that consumers have few places to go for unbiased information.⁶ With the reduction in government information services, the public, when making purchasing decisions, must rely increasingly on information from product manufacturers. Officials of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs noted that reliance on advertising and manufacturers' information increases when products are technologically complex, or do not lend themselves to thorough examination prior to purchase.⁷

Although the CAC acknowledges that consumers are becoming more sophisticated, it also suggested that they are still significantly less so than members of the business community. In the CAC's view, the government should place greater emphasis on correcting this imbalance through consumer education programs.⁸

While a number of witnesses referred to the need to educate consumers, the Institute of Canadian Advertising (ICA) suggested that there was a corresponding obligation on government to educate the business