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Money a result of Ferguson's lawsuit against seven manufacturers

OLYMPIA — Attorney General Bob Ferguson announced nearly \$20 million in checks will begin going out today to nearly 8,400 Washington consumers as a result of Ferguson's recovery in price-fixing lawsuits against seven manufacturers of cathode ray tubes, or CRTs. The minimum check to consumers will be for \$25. The median check will be for \$52.

For over a decade, consumers in Washington and across the globe were significantly overcharged when they purchased products with a CRT, such as televisions and computer monitors. These charges were part of a price-fixing conspiracy by the world's largest CRT manufacturers. For some products, this scheme may have increased the price consumers paid by as much as 30 percent, depending on the purchased product.

"These large companies illegally conspired behind closed doors to drive up the cost of their products," Ferguson said. "Washington consumers deserve to get their money back."

The approximately 8,370 consumers receiving checks filed claims during the claims process that extended from April 3, 2019 to June 17, 2019, reporting that they lived in Washington between 1995 and 2007 and purchased a CRT television or computer monitor. This is the first round of restitution checks from the CRT price-fixing lawsuit. Ferguson expects smaller rounds of restitution in the future.

Washington businesses and state agencies also act as consumers when they buy consumer products. Consequently, the price fixing scheme harmed businesses and state agencies that purchased CRT televisions and computer monitors.

The largest consumer restitution check will go to Providence St. Joseph Health, which will receive about \$3.2 million. State agencies and universities will receive a total of approximately \$3 million from the recovery.

Case background

Ferguson's lawsuit asserted CRT manufacturers, including Samsung, LG, Panasonic, Hitachi, Chunghwa, Toshiba and Philips, engaged in a price-fixing scheme to drive up the cost of CRTs from

1995 to 2007. During those 12 years, the alleged price-fixing conspiracy caused Washington consumers to be overcharged for their CRT televisions and computer monitors.

Ferguson's lawsuit asserted the companies held secret meetings, known internally as "glass meetings," in which they agreed to fix prices of CRTs. For example, the lawsuit alleged the companies agreed to artificially restrict supply to keep prices high and share information with competitors regarding capacity, production, prices and customer demands for CRTs.

According to the lawsuit, conspirators split the glass meetings into three tiers: "top meetings" for high-level company executives, "management meetings" for mid-level managers, and "working-level meetings" for lower-level sales and marketing employees.

The lawsuit alleged the companies' scheme allowed them to keep CRT prices high, even as liquid crystal display, or LCD, screens were introduced to the market.

Until the late 2000s, CRTs were the primary technology for television screens and computer monitors. In 1999, CRT monitors accounted for more than 90 percent of the retail market for computer monitors in North America. The technology has largely fallen out of use in recent years, as flat-screen televisions and computer monitors made with LCD screens became more popular. The companies no longer produce CRTs.

Antitrust Division Chief Jonathan Mark and Assistant Attorneys General Justin Wade, Neal Luna and Eric Newman worked on the case.

The Office of the Attorney General's Antitrust Division is responsible for enforcing the antitrust provisions of Washington's Unfair Business Practices-Consumer Protection Act. The division investigates and litigates complaints of anticompetitive conduct and reviews potentially anticompetitive mergers. The division also brings actions in federal court under the federal antitrust laws. It receives no general fund support, funding its own actions through recoveries made in other cases.

The Antitrust Division investigates complaints about potential anti-competitive activity. For information about filing a complaint, visit <https://fortress.wa.gov/atg/formhandler/ago/AntitrustComplaint.aspx>.

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