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OREGONIANS TO GET RELIEF FROM UNWELCOME SOLICITATION CALLS



A package of consumer bills approved by the 1989 Oregon Legislature and signed into law by Governor Neil Goldschmidt will help Oregonians deal with the frustration of unwelcome telephone solicitation calls.

The legislation provides ways for telephone customers to discourage unsolicited telemarketing calls, requires telemarketers to register with the state Department of Justice, prohibits the use of computer-activated recorded messages for commercial solicitation and prohibits unwanted "junk fax" advertising.

In addition, consumers will have greater protection from telemarketing fraud.

"This legislation takes positive steps to protect the rights of Oregon telephone customers and gives them more control over the kinds of calls coming into their homes and places of business," said Governor Goldschmidt.

"While telemarketing can be a legitimate sales and fund-raising activity, all too many people experience nuisance, harassment and occasional outright fraud," the governor said. "These laws have real teeth which will help us deal with these complaints."

"The changes will take effect Oct. 3. The Oregon Public Utility Commission is developing administrative rules requiring telephone companies to notify customers of their rights under the new laws.

Here are highlights of the consumer-protection package:

Telephone companies are encouraged to offer customers a "no solicitation calls" symbol in telephone directories, modeled after a trial program in the current Salem directory.

Telephone solicitors will be prohibited from calling a person who has previously asked not to be called again. This will protect telephone customers from repeated nuisance calls and may be valuable in areas where "no solicitation calls" symbols are not available.

Violations of the new telemarketing laws will be illegal under the Unlawful Trade Practices Act. Telephone customers may seek damages of \$200 or more, plus legal costs.

Offending telephone solicitors—particularly those with repeated violations—may be targeted for additional enforcement by the state Attorney General's office, including a maximum \$25,000 fine.

The new laws will not apply to solicitation calls made under certain circumstances. The "no solicitation calls" symbol, for example, does not apply to public-opinion polling, or to telemarketing calls made to a person in response to a request or inquiry from that person.

24-HOUR PHONE LINK NOW AVAILABLE FOR HEARING AND SPEECH IMPAIRED

The Oregon Relay Service has expanded its operations to 24 hours a day, seven days a week, providing full telephone access for hearing- and speech-impaired Oregonians who have telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDDs).

With the service, hearing- and speech-impaired persons can use TDDs to telephone or receive calls from virtually any other person who has a telephone. Specially trained relay operators convey messages between the parties. Without the service, TDD users can telephone other TDDs only.

The relay service is part of the Telecommunications for the Deaf Access Program administered by the Oregon Public Utility Commission. Through this program, Oregon residents who are deaf, deaf-blind, severely hearing impaired or severely speech impaired may obtain TDD equipment on loan at no charge.

"Expansion of the relay service to 24 hours a day allows the hearing and speech impaired a full measure of telecommunications independence," said Commission Chair Ron Eachus. "With the relay service and a TDD, they have the same kind of access to the telephone network as everyone else."

Eachus noted that all Oregonians benefit from the service, since it allows hearing persons to telephone TDD users.

To place a call through the service, a hearing person calls toll-free 1-800-922-7362 (223-2076 in Portland). A TDD user calls toll-free 1-800-526-0661 (223-1353 in Portland).

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