

"Free" medical alerts set off warning bells

Written by
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The Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB) is warning the public of robocalls – automated telephone calls – telling seniors they're eligible for a free medical alert system. The BBB believes this is simply a tactic the company, which refers to themselves generically as Med Alert, is using to collect credit card information and try to get people to agree to monthly monitoring services – which are not free.

"First of all, robocalls like these are prohibited by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC)," said Dana Badgerow, president and CEO of the BBB of Minnesota and North Dakota. "Second, an offer is not free if you have to provide your credit card information to claim it. That's always a sign an offer isn't what it seems."

Consumers are told there is no cost to them and free delivery of the medical alert system is provided. However, in many cases being reported across the country, senior citizens who have supplied their credit card information to "verify" their identity have found they were charged the monthly service fee, usually around \$35, and the system never arrived. Others who received their devices have reported they had trouble returning them and getting a refund.

Some consumers state they were told a medical alert device had been purchased for them by a friend or family member. In other cases, callers have falsely invoked well-known medical alert

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companies, like Life Alert, famous for its "I've fallen and I can't get up" advertising. Life Alert has filed suit against two companies it believes to be fraudulently using their name to attract business. That matter is currently pending.

Here are some red flags to be on the lookout for in regard to calls of this nature:

- Be leery of unknown callers asking for your personal information. It's important to know who you're dealing with and always a good idea to be cautious about giving out information.
- Watch out for business names that sound like a company you've heard of, but with slight variations. This is often a sign a caller is attempting to mislead you.
- Offers that have handling charges and other fees are not free offers. In the case of "free" medical alert devices, you should always ask if there is a monthly fee involved.
- If a company is reluctant to reveal their contact information or provide answers to your questions directly, don't deal with them. Get all offers in writing before agreeing to anything.

Consumers who receive calls of this nature should report them at donotcall.gov or by calling 1-888-382-1222. If you're ever confronted with an offer you're unsure about, contact your local BBB at 800-646-6222 or visit bbb.org

The mission of the Better Business Bureau is to be the leader in building marketplace trust by promoting, through self-regulation, the highest standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action that inform, assist and protect the general public. We are open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact the BBB at bbb.org or 651-699-1111, toll-free at 1-800-646-6222.