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MEDIA ALERT

"Consumer alert: Robot telemarketing calls ringing Utah phones off the hook"

"Division of Consumer Protection reports robo calls flooding cell phones, land lines statewide"

(For immediate release...)

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah - Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Commerce, announced today that the Division of Consumer Protection continues to receive reports from Utah citizens receiving multiple automated telemarketing calls offering things such as hotel vacations, student loan debt relief, credit card offers, and solar energy promotions. While the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has taken many actions against companies since enacting the "Telemarketing Sales Rule" in September 2009, investigators nationwide are seeing a rapid rise in robo call complaints. As telemarketing technology has become cheaper, millions of automated calls are easy to program and may be tougher for investigators to trace. According to the Federal Communications Commission Robocall Strike Force report, 29 billion unwanted pre-recorded calls hit American phones last year.

As a first line of defense, Utahns are encouraged to check the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) "Do Not Call Registry" to make sure their home and cell phone numbers are listed; <https://www.donotcall.gov/> so advertisers are held accountable. While your phone numbers on the registry never expire, officials recognize the Do Not Call Registry is not an overall solution to fight these prerecorded pitches.

"Telemarketers know persistence pays off and someone will eventually take the bait. Bottom line? Don't answer calls or texts from numbers you don't recognize and make sure your home and cell numbers are entered in the Do Not Call Registry," advised Francine A. Giani, Executive Director.

Regulators point out that some prerecorded calls are allowable under telemarketing laws. For example, phone messages that pass on information such as outstanding debts, school closings, airline flight updates, or doctor's appointment reminders are permissible. Political calls and messages from charities on their own behalf are also exempt from regulation. What is not allowed are businesses contacting you with the intent to sell you a product or services without your consent.

Consumers are also advised to be on alert for telemarketing calls that use "spoofing"

techniques to pose as a local phone number to trick you into answering a sales call. These techniques are often found in imposter schemes where the caller poses as a government or business with threats of lawsuits, arrest warrants or other schemes to coerce the consumer into giving up account information over the phone or text.

“Spoofing can happen to anyone. I received a call on my cell phone that looked like my number was calling me. Instead, it was another robo call,” stated Daniel O’Bannon, Director, Utah Division of Consumer Protection.

While government and business phone numbers are exempt from federal Do Not Call protections, the following list offers steps any consumers can take to combat these calls.

Remedies for Robo Calls: Tips for Consumers

1. Don’t answer calls or texts from numbers you don’t know – if you do answer the phone, don’t respond to the invitation to press a number to opt out of future calls. This action only verifies that yours is a working number and makes you a target for future contact.
2. Register your phone number and cell phone numbers with the National Do Not Call Registry here; <https://www.donotcall.gov/> or by calling 1-888-382-1222.
3. Contact your phone company – companies such as T-Mobile, AT & T and Verizon have technology to help combat robocalls.
4. Don’t answer “yes” to any robo call or telemarketing questions – some calls may try to trick consumers into agreeing to fees or charges by asking them if they can “hear me now”? Don’t fall for the bait - hang up the phone.
5. Imposter calls posing as government or known businesses – some calls may use ambush threats to try to steal your personal account and identity over the phone. If you get a call that sounds alarming, hang up and contact the government agency or company directly to find out more information before acting.

For more information or to file a consumer complaint, log to the Utah Division of Consumer Protection here; www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

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