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Water scam victims compensated

November 10, 2009

Last I heard, about half of the Latino families who fell victim to a water filtration scam earlier this year had received refunds for buying unnecessary systems meant to purify their tap water. I was wondering if the advocacy group helping these families was able to win compensation for the additional families who were duped by this scam.

— Maria N., Medford

Good news on that front, Maria. Help Now!, the Medford-based advocacy center that took the case, has reached a \$100,000-plus settlement with the companies involved in selling the filtration systems to unsuspecting families throughout the city.

American Home Solutions and Aquakleen, both out of California, have agreed to refund the amounts paid by more than 40 Medford-area Latino families for the equipment they purchased under false pretenses.

Sales people from both companies descended on Medford earlier this year, telling the families their water quality was dangerous.

What they neglected to mention, said Help Now! Executive Director Larry Kahn, is that Medford water routinely rates high on national water quality tests.

The sales pitch was based on faulty tests meant to trick the families into believing the water was unfit to drink, Kahn said.

All of these families were sold \$5,000 in equipment, which was installed by unlicensed plumbers. In many instances leaks developed, causing damage to homes.

The equipment is being removed by licensed plumbers selected by Help Now! volunteers.

The companies also will compensate the families for the damage sustained by the leaks, Kahn said.

Attorneys for Help Now! were able to determine the sale contracts signed by their clients did not comply with state home sales solicitation laws. That allowed the clients to cancel their contracts.

Two attorneys aiding Help Now! are now suing one of the financing companies used by the water filtration companies for truth-in-lending law violations to recover damages for several clients beyond the settlement Help Now! concluded with the filtration companies.

"We are happy to have settled this matter," Kahn said. "These folks are hard-working people in the community and did not deserve to be taken advantage of in that way."

Send questions to "Since You Asked," Mail Tribune Newsroom, P.O. Box 1108, Medford, OR 97501; by fax to 541-776-4376; or by e-mail to youasked@mailtribune.com. We're sorry, but the volume of questions received prevents us from answering all of them.

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