

When Someone Knocks on Your Door . . .

Dealing with Peddler's and Solicitors in Howard County

Many residents don't like to be solicited at home regardless of whether it's by phone, e-mail or someone knocking on the door. Privacy concerns and the rise in scams make residents even more resentful of door-to-door solicitations. Nonetheless, many businesses still find this a profitable way to conduct business.

Individuals and businesses have a Constitutional right to go door to door, but State and County laws can regulate how door-to-door sales are conducted.

- In general, anyone who goes door-to-door in Howard County to offer or sell goods and services, take orders for the future delivery of goods and services, sell subscriptions to newspapers, magazines or other publications or request donations on behalf of charities or non-profit organizations are required to register with Howard County Office of Consumer Protection. (OCP)
- People involved in voter registration activities, campaigning for public office or ballot questions do not have to register with OCP.
- When companies and individuals register with OCP they are given an ID card. Note that having an ID card does not mean that the seller (or the goods or services s/he is selling) has the "endorsement" of the County, only that s/he is registered with OCP. Here's what the ID card looks like:

Howard County MD Peddler / Solicitors Card			
Registration No. #11-1111	Expiration Date: 06/30/2017		
Card Holder John Smith	unknown TEL unknown MD 11111		
Business XYZ Inc.	123 Apple Dr TEL 555-555-5555 Columbia MD 21045		
 <p>This ID Card has been issued by the Howard County Office of Consumer Protection 410-313-6420 Possession of this ID does not constitute endorsement by the County.</p>			

Howard County, MD Peddler / Solicitors Card			
Height 5'11"	Weight 200	Sex Male	
DOB 01/01/1990	Eye Color Blue	Hair Color Brown	
Vehicle Make & Model Honda Accord		Year 2015	
Vehicle Tag # xxx xxxx			
 <p>Hours to Peddle: 9:00 a.m. to Sunset Peddling of Foodstuffs: 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Charitable-Non Profit-No Restrictions</p>			
<p>The holder of an ID card shall carry this ID card on his person when engaged in peddling and shall display the ID card to any person who shall request to see it.</p>			

- Solicitors are required to carry their ID card on their person at all times and are required to show it to anyone who asks to see it.
- Door-to-door soliciting is allowed only between the hours of 9am to sunset.

- Door-to-door solicitors must leave a resident's property when asked.
- Under State law, most contracts signed in your home are subject to the Maryland Door to Door Sales Act, which gives the consumer three days to cancel the contract for any reason.

Tips for Avoiding or Interacting with Door-to-Door Solicitors

- When a solicitor comes to your door, remember: that person is only trying to do a job that they are legally allowed to do. If you are not interested in what the solicitor is offering, say so and politely ask them to leave.
- The simplest way to avoid door-to-door sellers is to simply not open your door. "No soliciting" signs can be helpful in deterring solicitors from knocking or ringing your door bell. Ignoring a "no soliciting sign" however, is not a criminal offense that is enforced by the police or other government agency.
- If you decide to talk with a door-to-door sales person, you should first ask to see their Howard County ID card. If they do not have the proper ID, ask the person to leave. You may report unregistered solicitors to the police or OCP.
- When considering an offer, don't feel pressured to make a decision to purchase on the spot. Before making any major purchase, research the company and ask for references. Beware of any offer that sounds too good to be true and assume that any offer that is made on a "now or never" basis is fraudulent.
- When solicited by a charity or other non-profit organization, don't give money on the spot. Request written information so that you can verify the legitimacy of the organization before donating money. Contact the Maryland Secretary of State at 800-825-4510 to verify that the caller is authorized to do fundraising.
- Be especially wary of home improvement contractors who come to your home claiming that they are "doing work in your neighborhood." Such "traveling" contractors often do not have valid home improvement licenses, or County IDs.
- If you decide to make a purchase that requires a contract, read the contract thoroughly before signing. Make sure that any statements, claims or promises made verbally are included in the written contract.
- Make sure the contract contains a notice about your right to cancel (within 3 days, 5 days for home improvement contracts and 7 days if you are 65 or older) and cancellation form.
- If for any reason you feel threatened or are not able to get the salesperson to leave, call 911 for police assistance.
- If you would like to report an unregistered sales person, or get more information on shopping for home improvements or other goods or services, contact OCP at 410-313-6420, or visit our website at: www.howardcountymd.gov/consumer.

To obtain this information in an alternative format, please contact the Office of Consumer Protection at 410-313-6420 (voice/relay) or email us at consumer@howardcountymd.gov