

Solar Panel Solicitation

Human Services Spotlight Series #6



Retired Couple Released from Solar Contract after Misleading Home Solicitation

In February of 2017, a local retired couple on a fixed income was approached by a company offering to install solar panels on their home which would greatly reduce their electricity bill. The salesman claimed that the solar panels would not only produce enough electricity to cover their energy needs at their home, but that the energy not being used would be purchased by their energy company, providing them with an estimated payment of \$30 to \$40 per month. Since the couple's sole source of income was their social security benefits, this sounded like a wonderful opportunity.

Unfortunately, they were misled and resulted in a financial burden they couldn't handle. The solar energy system cost was \$24,000, however, with interest, the total would be \$40,723 financed in 329 monthly payments. They called the finance company and was told they would not only need to make monthly payments for the next 27 years, but they'll also continue to receive a bill from the energy company for their electricity bill.



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The salesman had misled them not only on the benefits of the solar panels but the cost to them. In addition, the salesman hadn't provided the couple with a copy of the contract or notice of cancellation. By the time the couple tried to cancel, it was too late.

They had asked for help from several agencies, but found the help they needed from Pinellas County's Consumer Protection Division within Human Services. While there may have been criminal elements due to the nature of the sale (home solicitation), the couple just wanted to separate themselves from this company and have them take the solar panels off their roof.

Thanks to the Consumer Protection Investigator's diligent efforts, the solar company agreed to remove the panels and make repairs to the roof at no cost to the couple. The finance company also released them of any and all financial obligations.

The couple was extremely appreciative of the efforts put forth to help them resolve the matter.

Sometimes it is hard to spot fraud. Scams can be large or small, sophisticated or simple, but the people behind them have two things in common: they want to steal your money and avoid being caught. While most consumer transactions are completed satisfactorily, any consumer could experience unresolved problems such as defective products, erroneous bills or non-delivery of goods or services.

Pinellas County Consumer Protection works to find solutions that restore fairness and ensure legal compliance for consumers. Millions of dollars have been recovered through refunds, adjustments, and court-ordered restitution.

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