

714.16 Consumer frauds.

1. Definitions:

- a. The term "*advertisement*" includes the attempt by publication, dissemination, solicitation, or circulation to induce directly or indirectly any person to enter into any obligation or acquire any title or interest in any merchandise.
- b. "*Buyer*", as used in subsection 2, paragraph "h", means the person to whom the water system is being sold, leased, or rented.
- c. "*Consumer information pamphlet*" means a publication which explains water quality, health effects, quality expectations for drinking water, and the effectiveness of water treatment systems.
- d. "*Consummation of sale*" means completion of the act of selling, leasing, or renting.
- e. "*Contaminant*" means any particulate, chemical, microbiological, or radiological substance in water which has a potentially adverse health effect and for which a maximum contaminant level (MCL) or treatment technique requirement or an action level established in lieu of a maximum contaminant level (MCL), has been specified in the national primary drinking water regulations.
- f. "*Deception*" means an act or practice which has the tendency or capacity to mislead a substantial number of consumers as to a material fact or facts.
- g. "*Label*", as used in subsection 2, paragraph "h", means the written, printed, or graphic matter permanently affixed or attached to or printed on the water treatment system.
- h. "*Manufacturer's performance data sheet*" means a booklet, document, or other printed material containing, at a minimum, the information required pursuant to subsection 2, paragraph "h".
- i. The term "*merchandise*" includes any objects, wares, goods, commodities, intangibles, securities, bonds, debentures, stocks, real estate or services.
- j. The term "*person*" includes any natural person or the person's legal representative, partnership, corporation (domestic and foreign), company, trust, business entity or association, and any agent, employee, salesperson, partner, officer, director, member, stockholder, associate, trustee or cestui que trust thereof.
- k. The term "*sale*" includes any sale, offer for sale, or attempt to sell any merchandise for cash or on credit.
- l. "*Seller*", as used in subsection 2, paragraph "h", means the person offering the water treatment system for sale, lease, or rent.
- m. The term "*subdivided lands*" refers to improved or unimproved land or lands divided or proposed to be divided for the purpose of sale or lease, whether immediate or future, into five or more lots or parcels; provided, however, it does not apply to the leasing of apartments, offices, stores or similar space within an apartment building, industrial building or commercial building unless an undivided interest in the land is granted as a condition precedent to occupying space in said structure.
- n. "*Unfair practice*" means an act or practice which causes substantial, unavoidable injury to consumers that is not outweighed by any consumer or competitive benefits which the practice produces.
- o. "*Water treatment system*" means a device or assembly for which a claim is made that it will improve the quality of drinking water by reducing one or more contaminants through mechanical, physical, chemical, or

biological processes or combinations of the processes. As used in this paragraph and in subsection 2, paragraph "h", each model of a water treatment system shall be deemed a distinct water treatment system.

2. a. The act, use or employment by a person of an unfair practice, deception, fraud, false pretense, false promise, or misrepresentation, or the concealment, suppression, or omission of a material fact with intent that others rely upon the concealment, suppression, or omission, in connection with the lease, sale, or advertisement of any merchandise or the solicitation of contributions for charitable purposes, whether or not a person has in fact been misled, deceived, or damaged, is an unlawful practice.

It is deceptive advertising within the meaning of this section for a person to represent in connection with the lease, sale, or advertisement of any merchandise that the advertised merchandise has certain performance characteristics, accessories, uses, or benefits or that certain services are performed on behalf of clients or customers of that person if, at the time of the representation, no reasonable basis for the claim existed. The burden is on the person making the representation to demonstrate that a reasonable basis for the claim existed.

A retailer who uses advertising for a product, other than a drug or other product claiming to have a health related benefit or use, prepared by a supplier shall not be liable under this section unless the retailer participated in the preparation of the advertisement; knew or should have known that the advertisement was deceptive, false, or misleading; refused to withdraw the product from sales upon the request of the attorney general pending a determination of whether the advertisement was deceptive, false, or misleading; refused upon the request of the attorney general to provide the name and address of the supplier; or refused to cooperate with the attorney general in an action brought against the supplier under this section.

"Material fact" as used in this subsection does not include repairs of damage to or adjustments on or replacements of parts with new parts of otherwise new merchandise if the repairs, adjustments or replacements are made to achieve compliance with factory specifications and are made before sale of the merchandise at retail and the actual cost of any labor and parts charged to or performed by a retailer for any such repairs, adjustments and parts does not exceed three hundred dollars or ten percent of the actual cost to a retailer including freight of the merchandise, whichever is less, providing that the seller posts in a conspicuous place notice that repairs, adjustments or replacements will be disclosed upon request. The exemption provided in this paragraph does not apply to the concealment, suppression or omission of a material fact if the purchaser requests disclosure of any repair, adjustment or replacement.

b. The advertisement for sale, lease or rent, or the actual sale, lease, or rental of any merchandise at a price or with a rebate or payment or other consideration to the purchaser which is contingent upon the procurement of prospective customers provided by the purchaser, or the procurement of sales, leases, or rentals to persons suggested by the purchaser, is declared to be an unlawful practice rendering any obligation incurred by the buyer in connection therewith, completely void and a nullity. The rights and obligations of any contract relating to such contingent price, rebate, or payment shall be interdependent and inseverable from the rights and obligations relating to the sale, lease, or rental.

c. It is an unlawful practice for any person to advertise the sale of merchandise at reduced rates due to the cessation of business operations and after the date of the first such advertisement remain in business under the same or substantially the same ownership, or under the same or substantially the same trade name, or to continue to offer for sale the same type of merchandise at the same location for more than one hundred twenty days. As used in this paragraph *"person"* includes a person who acquires an ownership interest in the business either within sixty days before the initial advertisement of the sale or at any time after the initial advertisement of the sale. In addition, a person acquiring an ownership interest shall comply with paragraph "g" if the person adds additional merchandise to the sale.

d. (1) No person shall offer or advertise within this state for sale or lease, any subdivided lands without first filing with the real estate commission true and accurate copies of all road plans, plats, field notes, and

diagrams of water, sewage, and electric power lines as they exist at the time of the filing, however, this filing is not required for a subdivision subject to section 306.21 or chapter 354. A filing shall be accompanied by a fee of fifty dollars for each subdivision included, payable to the real estate commission.

(2) False or misleading statements filed pursuant to subparagraph (1) or section 306.21 or chapter 354, and advertising, offers to sell, or contracts not in substantial conformity with the filings made pursuant to section 306.21 or chapter 354 are unlawful.

e. Any violations of chapter 123 or any other provisions of law by a manufacturer, distiller, vintner, importer, or any other person participating in the distribution of alcoholic liquor or beer as defined in chapter 123.

f. A violation of a provision of sections 535C.1 through 535C.10 is an unlawful practice.

g. It is an unlawful practice for a person to acquire directly or indirectly an interest in a business which has either gone out of business or is going out of business and conduct or continue a going-out-of-business sale where additional merchandise has been added to the merchandise of the liquidating business for the purposes of the sale, unless the person provides a clear and conspicuous notice in all advertisements that merchandise has been added. The advertisement shall also state the customary retail price of the merchandise that has been added or brought in for the sale. The person acquiring the interest shall obtain a permit to hold the sale before commencing the sale. If the sale is to be held in a city which has an ordinance regulating going-out-of-business sales, then the permit shall be obtained from the city. If the sale is to be located outside of a city or in a city which does not have an ordinance regulating going-out-of-business sales, then the permit shall be obtained from the county in which the proposed sale is to be held. The county board of supervisors shall prescribe the procedures necessary to obtain the permit. The permit shall state the percentage of merchandise for sale that was obtained from the liquidating business and the percentage of merchandise for sale that was added from other sources. The permit or an accurate reproduction of the permit shall be clearly and conspicuously posted at all entrances to the site of the sale and at all locations where sales are consummated. A person who violates this paragraph, including any misrepresentation of the presence and the percentage of additional merchandise that had been added to that of the liquidating company, is liable for a civil penalty of not to exceed one thousand dollars for each day of each violation. The civil penalties collected shall be deposited in the general fund of the political entity which prosecutes the violation. The civil penalty is in addition to and not in lieu of any criminal penalty. A political entity enforcing this paragraph may obtain a preliminary injunction without posting a bond to enjoin a violation of paragraph "c" and this paragraph pending a hearing.

This paragraph does not prohibit a city or county from adopting an ordinance prohibiting the conducting of a going-out-of-business sale in which additional merchandise is added to the merchandise of the liquidating business for the purposes of the sale.

h. It is an unlawful practice for a person to sell, lease, rent, or advertise the sale, lease, or rental of a water treatment system in this state, for which claims or representations of removing health-related contaminants are made, unless the water treatment system:

(1) Has been performance tested by a third-party testing agency that has been authorized by the Iowa department of public health. Alternatively, in lieu of third-party performance testing of the manufacturer's water treatment system, the manufacturer may rely upon the manufacturer's own test data after approval of the data by an accepted third-party evaluator as provided in this subparagraph. The Iowa department of public health shall review the qualifications of a third-party evaluator proposed by the manufacturer. The department may accept or reject a proposed third-party evaluator based upon the required review. If a third-party evaluator, accepted by the Iowa department of public health, finds that the manufacturer's test data is reliable, adequate, and fairly presented, the manufacturer may rely upon that data to satisfy the requirements of this subparagraph after filing a copy of the test data and the report of the third-party evaluator with the Iowa department of public health. The testing agency shall use, or the evaluator shall

review for the use of, approved methods of performance testing determined to be appropriate by the state hygienic laboratory.

(2) Has met the performance testing requirements specified in the testing protocol.

(3) Bears a conspicuous and legible label stating, "*IMPORTANT NOTICE Read the Manufacturer's Performance Data Sheet*" and is accompanied by a manufacturer's performance data sheet.

The manufacturer's performance data sheet shall be given to the buyer and shall be signed and dated by the buyer and the seller prior to the consummation of the sale of the water treatment system. The manufacturer's performance data sheet shall contain information including, but not limited to:

(a) The name, address, and telephone number of the seller.

(b) The name, brand, or trademark under which the unit is sold, and its model number.

(c) Performance and test data including, but not limited to, the list of contaminants certified to be reduced by the water treatment system; the test influent concentration level of each contaminant or surrogate for that contaminant; the percentage reduction or effluent concentration of each contaminant or surrogate; where applicable, the maximum contaminant level (MCL) or a treatment technique requirement or an action level established in lieu of a maximum contaminant level (MCL) specified in the national primary drinking water regulations; where applicable, the approximate capacity in gallons; where applicable, the period of time during which the unit is effective in reducing contaminants based upon the contaminant or surrogate influent concentrations used for the performance tests; where applicable, the flow rate, pressure, and operational temperature of the water during the performance tests.

(d) Installation instructions.

(e) The recommended operational procedures and requirements necessary for the proper operation of the unit including, but not limited to, electrical requirements; maximum and minimum pressure; flow rate; temperature limitations; maintenance requirements; and where applicable, replacement frequencies.

(f) The seller's limited warranty.

(4) Is accompanied by the consumer information pamphlet compiled by the Iowa department of public health.

The consumer information pamphlet provided to the buyer of a water treatment system shall be compiled by the Iowa department of public health, reviewed annually, and updated as necessary. The consumer information pamphlet shall be distributed to persons selling water treatment systems and the costs of the consumer information pamphlet shall be borne by persons selling water treatment systems. The Iowa department of public health shall adopt rules pursuant to chapter 17A and charge all fees necessary to administer this section.

i. It is an unlawful practice for a person to sell, lease, rent, or advertise the sale, lease, or rental of a water treatment system in this state for which false or deceptive claims or representations of removing health-related contaminants are made.

j. It is an unlawful practice for a person to make any representation or claim that the seller's water treatment system has been approved or endorsed by any agency of the state.

k. It is an unlawful practice for a supplier to commit a deceptive act or practice under chapter 537B.

l. It is an unlawful practice for a repair facility or manufacturer or distributor of aftermarket crash parts, as

defined in section 537B.4, to commit a deceptive act or practice under chapter 537B.

m. It is an unlawful practice for a person to advertise the sale of wood products without disclosing information which may affect the price of the product.

An advertisement for all plywood and dimension lumber products shall include the grade and species, in accordance with federal products standards 1 and 20, and the measure. The products advertised shall also be labeled according to the federal products standards.

An advertisement for any other wood product shall include the grade and species, according to the applicable federal product standards, and the measure. These products need not be labeled.

An advertisement for any wood products must also include the following:

(1) The condition of the wood product, including but not limited to the following designations:

(a) Green.

(b) Kiln-dried.

(c) Air-dried or partially air-dried.

(2) Whether the wood product consists of seconds, culls, shop grade, or ungraded material.

Use of any contrived or unrecognized grading standard is prohibited, and any factors affecting the final delivered price of the products shall be disclosed and displayed in a conspicuous place.

This paragraph applies only to persons who offer wood products for sale in the ordinary course of business, except that this paragraph does not apply to any person who produces rough-sawn lumber, commonly referred to as native lumber, in this state. For purposes of this paragraph:

"Dimension lumber" means softwood lumber nominally referred to as *"two inch by four inch"* or greater.

"Labeling" means all labels and other written, printed, branded, or graphic matter upon any building material.

"Plywood" means a structural material consisting of sheets or chips of wood glued or cemented together.

"Wood products" means any wood products derived from trees as a result of any work or manufacturing process upon the wood, and intended primarily for use as a building material.

n. (1) It is an unlawful practice for a person to misrepresent the geographic location of a supplier of a service or product by listing a fictitious business name or an assumed business name in a local telephone directory or directory assistance database if all of the following apply:

(a) The name purportedly represents the geographic location of the supplier.

(b) The listing does not identify the address, including the city and state, of the supplier.

(c) Calls made to a local telephone number are routinely forwarded to or otherwise transferred to a business location that is outside the local calling area covered by the local telephone directory or directory assistance database.

(2) A telephone company, provider of directory assistance, publisher of a local telephone directory, or officer,

employee, or agent of such company, provider, or publisher shall not be liable in a civil action under this section for publishing in any directory or directory assistance database the listing of a fictitious or assumed business name of a person in violation of subparagraph (1) unless the telephone company, directory assistance provider, directory publisher, or officer, employee, or agent of the company, provider, or publisher is the person committing such violation.

(3) For purposes of this paragraph:

(a) "*Local telephone directory*" means a telephone classified advertising directory or the business section of a telephone directory that is distributed free of charge to some or all telephone subscribers in a local area.

(b) "*Local telephone number*" means a telephone number that has a three-number prefix used by the provider of telephone service for telephone customers physically located within the area covered by the local telephone directory in which the number is listed. The term does not include long distance numbers or 800, 888, or 900 exchange numbers listed in the telephone directory.

3. When it appears to the attorney general that a person has engaged in, is engaging in, or is about to engage in any practice declared to be unlawful by this section or when the attorney general believes it to be in the public interest that an investigation should be made to ascertain whether a person in fact has engaged in, is engaging in or is about to engage in, any such practice, the attorney general may:

a. Require such person to file on such forms as the attorney general may prescribe a statement or report in writing under oath or otherwise, as to all the facts and circumstances concerning the sale or advertisement of merchandise by such person, and such other data and information as the attorney general may deem necessary;

b. Examine under oath any person in connection with the sale or advertisement of any merchandise;

c. Examine any merchandise or sample thereof, record, book, document, account or paper as the attorney general may deem necessary; and

d. Pursuant to an order of a district court impound any record, book, document, account, paper, or sample of merchandise that is produced in accordance with this section, and retain the same in the attorney general's possession until the completion of all proceedings in connection with which the same are produced.

4. a. To accomplish the objectives and to carry out the duties prescribed by this section, the attorney general, in addition to other powers conferred upon the attorney general by this section, may issue subpoenas to any person, administer an oath or affirmation to any person, conduct hearings in aid of any investigation or inquiry, prescribe such forms and promulgate such rules as may be necessary, which rules shall have the force of law.

b. Subject to paragraph "c", information, documents, testimony, or other evidence provided to the attorney general by a person pursuant to paragraph "a" or subsection 3, or provided by a person as evidence in any civil action brought pursuant to this section, shall not be admitted in evidence, or used in any manner whatsoever, in any criminal prosecution or forfeiture proceeding against that person. If a criminal prosecution or forfeiture proceeding is initiated in a state court against a person who has provided information pursuant to paragraph "a" or subsection 3, the state shall have the burden of proof that the information provided was not used in any manner to further the criminal investigation, prosecution, or forfeiture proceeding.

c. Paragraph "b" does not apply unless the person has first asserted a right against self-incrimination and the attorney general has elected to provide the person with a written statement that the information, documents, testimony, or other evidence at issue are subject to paragraph "b". After a person has been provided with such a written statement by the attorney general, a claim of privilege against self-incrimination is not a defense to

any action or proceeding to obtain the information, documents, testimony, or other evidence. The limitation on the use of evidence in a criminal proceeding contained in this section does not apply to any prosecution or proceeding for perjury or contempt of court committed in the course of the giving or production of the information, documents, testimony, or other evidence.

5. Service by the attorney general of any notice requiring a person to file a statement or report, or of a subpoena upon any person, shall be made personally within this state, but if such cannot be obtained, substituted service therefor may be made in the following manner:

a. Personal service thereof without this state; or

b. The mailing thereof by registered mail to the last known place of business, residence or abode within or without this state of such person for whom the same is intended; or

c. As to any person other than a natural person, in the manner provided in the Rules of Civil Procedure as if a petition had been filed; or

d. Such service as a district court may direct in lieu of personal service within this state.

6. If a person fails or refuses to file a statement or report, or obey any subpoena issued by the attorney general, the attorney general may, after notice, apply to the Polk county district court or the district court for the county in which the person resides or is located and, after hearing, request an order:

a. Granting injunctive relief, restraining the sale or advertisement of any merchandise by such persons.

b. Dissolving a corporation created by or under the laws of this state or revoking or suspending the certificate of authority to do business in this state of a foreign corporation or revoking or suspending any other licenses, permits, or certificates issued pursuant to law to such person which are used to further the allegedly unlawful practice.

c. Granting such other relief as may be required until the person files the statement or report, or obeys the subpoena.

7. A civil action pursuant to this section shall be by equitable proceedings. If it appears to the attorney general that a person has engaged in, is engaging in, or is about to engage in a practice declared to be unlawful by this section, the attorney general may seek and obtain in an action in a district court a temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, or permanent injunction prohibiting the person from continuing the practice or engaging in the practice or doing an act in furtherance of the practice. The court may make orders or judgments as necessary to prevent the use or employment by a person of any prohibited practices, or which are necessary to restore to any person in interest any moneys or property, real or personal, which have been acquired by means of a practice declared to be unlawful by this section, including the appointment of a receiver in cases of substantial and willful violation of this section. If a person has acquired moneys or property by any means declared to be unlawful by this section and if the cost of administering reimbursement outweighs the benefit to consumers or consumers entitled to the reimbursement cannot be located through reasonable efforts, the court may order disgorgement of moneys or property acquired by the person by awarding the moneys or property to the state to be used by the attorney general for the administration and implementation of this section. Except in an action for the concealment, suppression, or omission of a material fact with intent that others rely upon it, it is not necessary in an action for reimbursement or an injunction, to allege or to prove reliance, damages, intent to deceive, or that the person who engaged in an unlawful act had knowledge of the falsity of the claim or ignorance of the truth. A claim for reimbursement may be proved by any competent evidence, including evidence that would be appropriate in a class action.

In addition to the remedies otherwise provided for in this subsection, the attorney general may request and

the court may impose a civil penalty not to exceed forty thousand dollars per violation against a person found by the court to have engaged in a method, act, or practice declared unlawful under this section; provided, however, a course of conduct shall not be considered to be separate and different violations merely because the conduct is repeated to more than one person. In addition, on the motion of the attorney general or its own motion, the court may impose a civil penalty of not more than five thousand dollars for each day of intentional violation of a temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, or permanent injunction issued under authority of this section. A penalty imposed pursuant to this subsection is in addition to any penalty imposed pursuant to section 537.6113. Civil penalties ordered pursuant to this subsection shall be paid to the treasurer of state to be deposited in the general fund of the state.

8. When a receiver is appointed by the court pursuant to this section, the receiver shall have the power to sue for, collect, receive and take into possession all the goods and chattels, rights and credits, moneys and effects, lands and tenements, books, records, documents, papers, choses in action, bills, notes and property of every description, derived by means of any practice declared to be illegal and prohibited by this section, including property with which such property has been mingled if it cannot be identified in kind because of such commingling, and to sell, convey, and assign the same and hold and dispose of the proceeds thereof under the direction of the court. Any person who has suffered damages as a result of the use or employment of any unlawful practices and submits proof to the satisfaction of the court that the person has in fact been damaged, may participate with general creditors in the distribution of the assets to the extent the person has sustained out-of-pocket losses. In the case of a partnership or business entity, the receiver shall settle the estate and distribute the assets under the direction of the court. The court shall have jurisdiction of all questions arising in such proceedings and may make such orders and judgments therein as may be required.

9. Subject to an order of the court terminating the business affairs of any person after receivership proceedings held pursuant to this section, the provisions of this section shall not bar any claim against any person who has acquired any moneys or property, real or personal, by means of any practice herein declared to be unlawful.

10. A civil action pursuant to this section may be commenced in the county in which the person against whom it is brought resides, has a principal place of business, or is doing business, or in the county where the transaction or any substantial portion of the transaction occurred, or where one or more of the victims reside.

11. In an action brought under this section, the attorney general is entitled to recover costs of the court action and any investigation which may have been conducted, including reasonable attorneys' fees, for the use of this state.

12. If any provision of this section or the application thereof to any person or circumstances is held invalid, the invalidity shall not affect other provisions of applications of the section which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application and to this end the provisions of this section are severable.

13. The attorney general or the designee of the attorney general is deemed to be a regulatory agency under chapter 692 for the purpose of receiving criminal intelligence data relating to violations of this section.

14. This section does not apply to the newspaper, magazine, publication, or other print media in which the advertisement appears, or to the radio station, television station, or other electronic media which disseminates the advertisement if the newspaper, magazine, publication, radio station, television station, or other print or electronic media has no knowledge of the fraudulent intent, design, or purpose of the advertiser at the time the advertisement is accepted; and provided, further, that nothing herein contained shall apply to any advertisement which complies with the rules and regulations of, and the statutes administered by the federal trade commission.

15. The attorney general may bring an action on behalf of the residents of this state, or as parens patriae, under the federal Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act, Pub. L. No. 103-297, and

pursue any and all enforcement options available under that Act. Subsequent amendments to that Act which do not substantially alter its structure and purpose shall not be construed to affect the authority of the attorney general to pursue an action pursuant to this section, except to the extent the amendments specifically restrict the authority of the attorney general.

[S13, § 5051-a; C24, 27, 31, 35, 39, § **13069, 13070**; C46, 50, 54, 58, 62, § 713.24, 713.25; C66, 71, 73, 75, 77, § 713.24; C79, 81, § 714.16]

83 Acts, ch 146, § 12; 85 Acts, ch 16, § 1, 2; 87 Acts, ch 164, § 17; 88 Acts, ch 1016, § 1, 2; 89 Acts, ch 93, § 7; 89 Acts, ch 129, § 1; 90 Acts, ch 1010, § 6; 90 Acts, ch 1236, § 53; 91 Acts, ch 212, § 1; 92 Acts, ch 1062, § 3; 94 Acts, ch 1142, §5; 98 Acts, ch 1200, §13; 2000 Acts, ch 1079, §1; 2000 Acts, ch 1232, §85; 2001 Acts, ch 58, §15, 16; 2002 Acts, ch 1119, §194, 203

2002 amendment to subsection 2, paragraph n, subparagraph (1) takes effect April 22, 2002, and applies retroactively to July 1, 2000; 2002 Acts, ch 1119, §203