

Authorities Warning Area Residents of Veteran Funeral Arrangement Scam

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Original article

If you're a veteran, and a smooth-talking salesman comes to your home claiming to be from the Department of Veterans Affairs hawking funeral arrangements, watch out, authorities say.

That's the word from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, which is warning area residents about a potential scam involving the company American Veteran KCA.

The Kansas Attorney General's Office has heard complaints, too, and last month reached a settlement with the company. If the account from a Jefferson County couple and sheriff's office are true, the company could have violated the terms of that settlement.

A Jefferson County couple called the sheriff's office saying they were visited at home by a salesman described as having an "Adolf Hitler-type mustache" and dark, unkempt hair with wire-rimmed glasses, according to Sheriff Jeff Herrig. Officers said the couple wrote a check for more than \$6,000 to pay for what they thought was a funeral package, but in actuality was just two caskets.

The salesman called last Wednesday, and identified himself as working with Veterans Affairs, according to the sheriff's office. On Thursday, police said, he met with the couple, and identified himself as representing American Veteran KCA and talked with them about buying caskets, and about both of them being able to be buried at the National Cemetery in Leavenworth.

As part of the settlement with the attorney general, all the company's customers received a letter stating the company was not affiliated with the VA was not affiliated with the National Cemetery and was not affiliated with any governmental agency.

All customers who had purchased caskets from the company are entitled to a full refund as part of the settlement, provided they ask before Oct. 30, said Gavin Young, a spokesman for the Kansas Attorney General's Office. The company also had to pay a \$20,000 fine.

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Young said he hadn't heard of the events in Jefferson County — but he said consumers should report any violations of the settlement agreement to the Kansas attorney general.

An attorney for American Veteran KCA and the company's general manager both denied the company was operating a scam, and said they were a legitimate casket-selling company.

Shawna Estrada, listed as the company's general manager in a Better Business Bureau online report, said the company operated out of a warehouse in Kansas City. It used materials clearly designated as not being affiliated with the VA, and approved by the Kansas attorney general. It does, however, provide brochures that let veterans know of their free benefits they are entitled to.

“We were not in compliance with some of Kansas' laws,” she said. “We have corrected that.”

William Owensby, director of the National Cemetery in Leavenworth, said neither the cemetery nor the VA would send anyone to veterans' homes to discuss funeral arrangements, Owensby said, and he made clear that all the services available to veterans and their spouses through the cemetery are available without charge.