

Property-deed scam targets homeowners

By Fred Hanson
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DEDHAM – Norfolk County Registrar of Deeds William O’Donnell is warning property owners about the latest version of an old scam.

He said notices are being sent by Registered Property Services of Sioux Falls, S.D., that appear to be a bill for \$83 for a copy of a property deed. The notices have a due date and appear to be aimed at new homeowners.

If a recipient gets to the fine print of the notice, he or she will find it is actually a sales pitch to buy a copy of the deed.

“It looks like a government bill,” O’Donnell said. “It looks like it is intentionally misleading.”

O’Donnell said certified copies of deeds are available from his office for \$2 each or from the lawyer who handled the transaction.

“Unfortunately, consumers are interpreting this as a bill due and not the questionable solicitation that it actually is. It may be legal, but I think it’s outrageous that these businesses are contacting customers with the intention to deceive and mislead.”

Officials around the country have issued warnings about this and similar offers.

In Utah last month, the state Division of Consumer Protection issued a 48-count administrative citation against three companies involved in an identical offer, seeking \$120,000 in fines.

Record Transfer Services and Property Transfer Services both list addresses that are virtual offices in Washington, D.C., and Wilmington, Del. Both businesses are part of Transaction Data Services, which is based in Camarillo, Calif., the complaint states.

Property Transfer Services also used the same South Dakota address as Registered Property Services, which is a UPS Store.

The complaint is based on letters sent to 16 Utah residents.

A phone message seeking comment left with an operator at the company’s toll-free number was not returned.

O’Donnell said he heard about the solicitation from a Dedham resident.

O’Donnell invites anyone who has received a suspicious third-party solicitation regarding their property or a recent real estate transaction to contact the registry’s customer service center at 781-461-6101 or by email at registerodonnell@norfolkdeeds.org.

Fred Hanson may be reached at fhanson@ledger.com.