

# Ministry releases report on telemarketing

Telemarketing - the sale of products and services over the telephone - is good news for many people in Ontario. Experts at Ontario's Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations say most consumers like the convenience of shopping for quality goods at home. Businesses like being able to reach many customers quickly.

But not all consumers are hap-

py with telemarketing techniques. That's why Ontario's consumer ministry recently released a major report on the subject. "Telemarketing in Canada" was prepared by a ministry-led Federal/Provincial/Territorial government working-group. Meetings were held to compare notes on telemarketing practices across the country, so the group could identify problems and

possible solutions. The committee heard from many consumers. Some reported being pushed into buying items they didn't want by aggressive telephone salespeople.

Law-enforcement agencies said that, although telemarketing scams aren't common, it can be difficult to catch up with dishonest promoters who do business by phone. Someone

operating from another province or country can take advantage of unsuspecting Ontario consumers. There may be little time to issue a public warning.

Many disputes with telemarketing firms result when unwary customers give out credit card numbers over the telephone. If they change their minds about wanting the product or the promoter is dishonest, it may be dif-

icult to have unwanted credit-card charges reversed.

Other consumers dislike ADADs (automated dialing and announcing devices) or computerized voices that phone to try to sell something. Some see them as an invasion of privacy. Others just don't like talking to a machine.

Despite the problems, telemarketing is growing in popularity and profits. Canadian telephone companies now make more than \$2 billion per year from this business.

The report on telemarketing provides options for action by businesses and government, such as the following.

• The name of the company and other important information should be told to consumers at the start of the call.

• Consumers should have to give permission before their names are included on lists to be sold to promoters.

• Governments and law-enforcement agencies should coordinate efforts to identify telemarketing scams.

• Businesses that profit from telemarketing should provide consumer education about their practices.

Help for consumers who don't want to receive calls from telemarketers is now being offered by the Canadian Direct Marketing Association (CDMA). More than 80 per cent of Canadian telemarketers are members of this business association.

A new program called the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) is available free to consumers who want their names taken off most telemarketers' lists.

Registering with TPS - which is as simple as sending a letter saying you want your name taken off the lists of association members - reduces the number of calls consumers receive from businesses that traditionally use telemarketing.

"These include magazine publishers, insurance companies, book and record clubs and market research firms," says CDMA President John Gustavson.

"While most people enjoy receiving information about products and services in their homes, some don't. To help them out we're providing this service. Companies that don't comply with the TPS program will find their association membership revoked."

Will registration with TPS end all advertising calls?

"No," says Gustavson. "Consumers who register will still get calls from local merchants, religious and charitable organizations and others that don't belong to the association."

Consumers who want their names removed from telemarketing lists should write to: Operation Integrity - TPS, c/o Canadian Direct Marketing Assoc., 1 Concorde Gate, Ste. 607, Don Mills, Ontario, M3C 3N6.

Those who want to be taken off lists for specific types of companies are advised to write the firms directly. CDMA members must remove consumers from their lists upon request.

Anyone wishing to receive information on a variety of consumer issues should contact the Consumer Information Centre, Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, 555 Yonge St., 1st fl., Toronto, Ontario, M7A 2H6.

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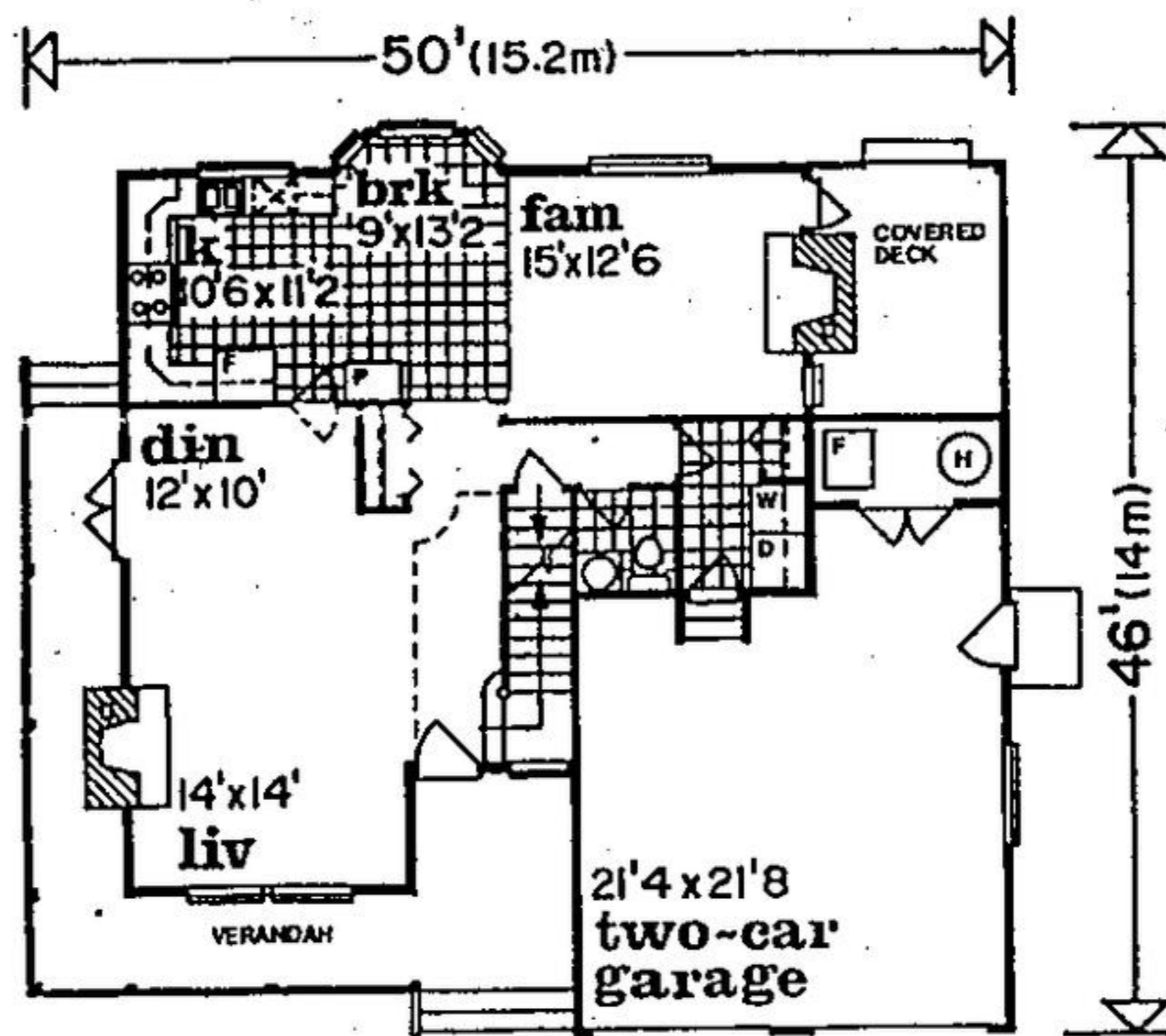
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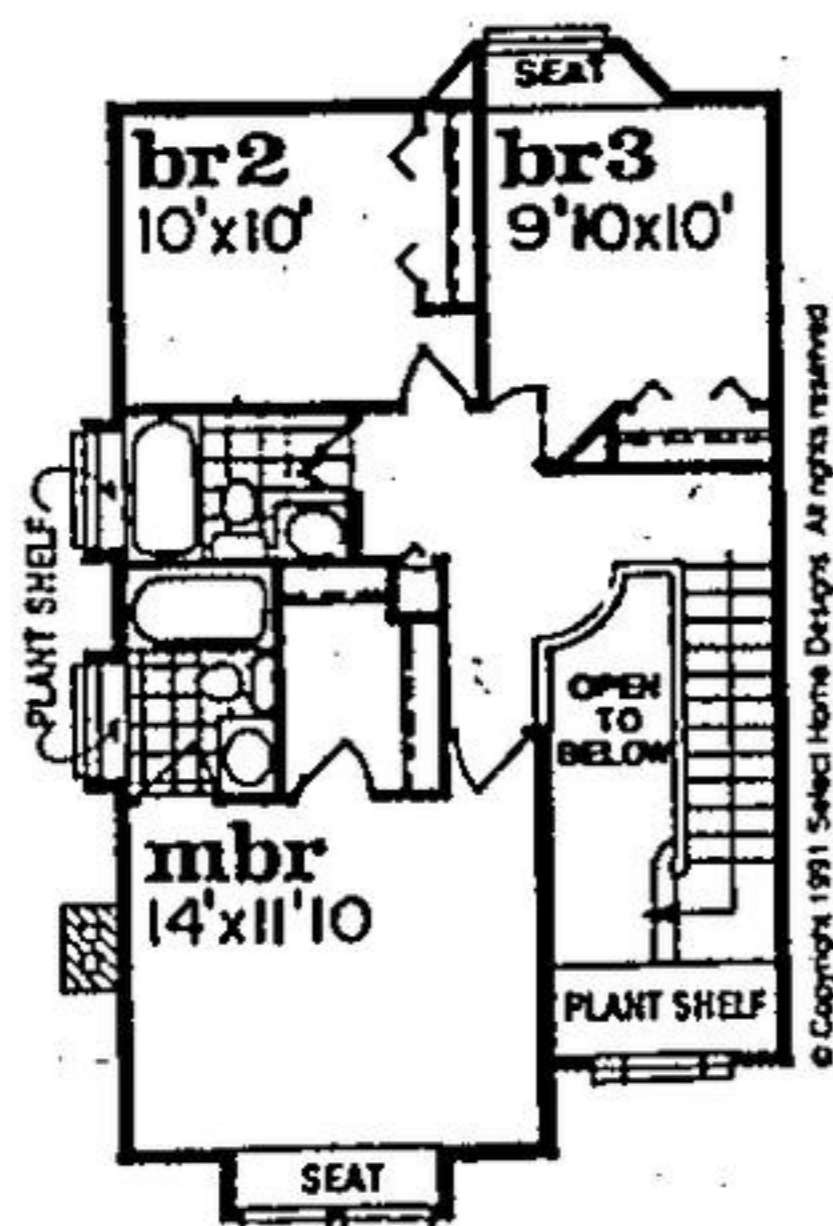
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