

NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONSUMER AFFAIRS ISSUES TIPS ABOUT FITNESS CLUB MEMBERSHIPS

Columbia, SC.....The New Year offers everyone an opportunity for a fresh start. For many consumers, the first step is joining a fitness club to drop those holiday pounds. The convenience, accountability, and resources of fitness clubs are an attractive offer. Unfortunately, the economic climate has caused a number of facilities to close in the last year. The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) works diligently to ensure refunds to consumers in these scenarios.

Consumers can, however, reap all the benefits of a fitness club membership without the worry of lost dollars by asking the following questions before signing on the dotted line.

Does the fitness club have a certificate issued by SCDCA displayed?

Fitness facilities must be licensed by SCDCA and must renew their certificate of authority every year. If the facility does not have a certificate posted or the certificate has an expired date, steer clear.

Does the fitness club have a surety bond or letter of credit?

Ensure the money invested in a long-term contract is backed should the facility have financial difficulties down the road. Fitness facilities must have a surety bond or letter of credit for contracts that obligate the consumer for longer than three months or greater than \$200.

About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina Consumers.

Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit www.scconsumer.gov.

Does your contract include an automatic renewal clause?

Automatic renewal clauses may be included in your contract allowing the fitness club to extend the contract and continue to draft or require payments. By law, the prospective member must sign or initial the automatic renewal clause when finalizing the original contract. The member must also be sent notice of the automatic renewal 30 days prior to the end of their original contract.

Have you read and understood the contract word for word?

Fitness club contracts longer than three months or greater than \$200 may only be canceled in four situations: three-day right to cancel, death, relocation 50 miles away, or a permanent disability. The club may offer better cancellation provisions in your contract. Ask a representative before signing. Consumers should also keep in mind that items such as aerobic classes or child care may incur extra costs. Make sure you understand the terms and conditions of your contract including payment method and schedule as well as cancellation policies.

By keeping these tips in mind, consumers will be on their way to losing pounds and not dollars in 2009. For more information, contact the Public Information Division at 803.734.4190, toll free in SC at 1.800.922.1594, or online at www.sconsumer.gov.

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