

Britain clamps down on cold-calling epidemic

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Companies that bombard customers with nuisance calls and texts could face large fines under changes to British law announced Wednesday that make it easier for regulators to take action.

Unsolicited marketing calls are already illegal in Britain, but from April the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) will no longer have to prove that a firm has caused "substantial damage or substantial distress" before sanctions can be taken.

The ICO will warn companies flouting the regulations, and will be able to issue fines of up to £500,000 (682,000 euros, \$774,000) for the worst and most persistent offenders.

Prime Minister David Cameron said the move would be "welcomed up and down the country".

"It (marketing) should never be done by nagging people or being a nuisance," he told parliament.

The government also says it will look at introducing measures to hold board-level executives responsible for nuisance calls and texts.

"For far too long companies have bombarded people with unwanted marketing calls and texts, and escaped punishment because they did not cause enough harm," Digital Economy Minister Ed Vaizey said.

Around four out of five people surveyed by the consumer group Which?

said they were regularly cold-called at home, with a third of them saying they it made them feel intimidated.

The ICO, which deals with data privacy issues, received more than 175,000 complaints related to nuisance calls and texts in 2014.

Welcoming the changes, Which? executive director Richard Lloyd, who chaired the taskforce, said: "We want the regulator to send a clear message by using their new powers to full effect without delay."

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