

Press Information

September 11, 2009

LIFELINE ISSUES SAFETY NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

FRAMINGHAM, Mass. — Philips Lifeline is issuing an important safety notice to its more than 750,000 subscribers of its personal emergency response service to alert users of potential risks with wearing a “pendant” style help button. The service is used primarily by seniors living independently in their homes who feel they are at risk of falls. By pressing a “help button” worn on the body, users connect to a remote monitoring center, staffed 24 hours a day, that can send emergency assistance to the user’s home.

This notice directs users to consult with their caregivers or service provider to help determine which style of help button is most appropriate for them.

For users of any medical alert service, the two most prevalent methods for wearing a help button are around the neck (“pendant” style) and around the wrist (“bracelet” style). Lifeline has received several reports of incidents where a user’s pendant style neck cord became accidentally entangled, causing either injury or death. The pendant style button is a popular choice and is common throughout the industry, because when worn around the neck, the button is accessible to either hand, unlike the wrist worn version.

Many service providers, including Lifeline, offer pendants whose neck cord is not designed to break away, which can avoid having the help buttons accidentally fall off. If the pendant’s cord becomes entangled on another object while worn by the user, it can pose a risk of choking. As these medical alert services are used primarily by elderly subscribers, many with mobility limitations, this risk mainly applies to wearers of the pendant who use wheelchairs, walkers, beds with guard rails, or similar objects with protruding parts upon which the cord can become tangled.

Lifeline urges users of its medical alert services to consult with their caregivers or service provider to determine which style of help button is most appropriate for them. It is important that users make an informed choice to find the most suitable method for wearing their help button so that it is available at all times to summon for emergency help, if necessary.

Any adverse reactions experienced with the use of medical alert services should be reported to the FDA's MedWatch Program by phone at 1-800-FDA-1088, by fax at 1-800-FDA-0178, by mail at MedWatch, HF-2, FDA, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20852-9787, or on the MedWatch website at www.fda.gov/medwatch.

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