

Protect yourself from SCAM artists!

As spring and summer come to Michigan, one of the undesirable side effects of the warmer weather is the appearance of scam artists. These criminals, often operating under the guise of various home improvement services, harvest a new crop of unsuspecting victims each year.

Scam artists often weave a convincing tale that involves big savings for the lucky homeowner willing to produce the cash to seal a driveway, repair a roof, insulate an attic, or some similar home improvement project.

Sadly, many homeowners agree and hand over the money, only to realize later that they've been taken for a ride by someone using grossly substandard materials or swindled outright by someone posing as a handyman who takes their money and is not seen again.

Home improvement scams are among the most common frauds. These often consist of door-to-door solicitations where the con artist can be very effective in convincing an unwary homeowner that his services are needed when they aren't. Captain Michael Johnson of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, Rochester Hills Substation reported that criminal scam artists drive around neighborhoods looking for potential targets that are outside performing household chores.

A particularly popular fraud this time of year is the driveway seal coating scam, with the scam artist offering a cut-rate deal on material left over from another job. **But companies that specialize in driveway paving and maintenance usually don't go door-to-door trying to drum up business. As with all home improvement contractors, ask for references.**

Another popular scam involves thieves posing as utility workers. They typically gain entry to a home by claiming that there is a problem with telephone, gas or electric service. They'll ask the homeowner to perform a task in another part of the home as a distraction.

Always ask for identification from anyone representing himself as a utility worker, particularly if you are not aware of any problem. Do not invite the person in; instead, ask who made the service request. Call the utility for verification.

Protect yourself from scam artist criminals. Remember:

- Be skeptical
- Don't rush into signing documents
- Don't give out personal information
- Don't open your door to a stranger, or if you do, feel free to close the door on anyone trying to sell you something
- Don't give out **any** personal information on the phone, just hang up!
- Don't send money to receive "winning" lotteries or sweepstakes
- **Consult with someone you trust.**

Captain Johnson advised, "If a homeowner has the suspected SCAM artists at their door they should call 9-1-1 for a deputy to respond and investigate. (Call 9-1-1 if they feel the crime is in progress.) If they feel they have been already been a victim of a SCAM they can contact us at 248-858-4950 for a deputy to respond and take a report. Any additional information that they can obtain will help us in our investigation. A description of the suspects, the suspect vehicles, and license plates numbers could really help us catch the person(s) responsible for these crimes."

If you feel you are a victim of a scam, file a police report as soon as possible. You are not alone; nationwide, an estimated 25 million homeowners are victims of scams such as these each year, many of them senior citizens.

If you follow these guidelines, you can help protect yourself from criminal scam artists.