

Transient Merchants

How To Avoid Home Repair Scams

Each year criminal transient merchants travel the country promoting home repair scams to unsuspecting homeowners. These scams include, but are not limited to, asphalt paving, driveway spray coating, lightning rod installation and repair, septic tank cleaning, building and roof painting, roof repairs and pest extermination.

These individuals will target anybody, however senior citizens are preyed upon at an alarming rate. In a recent ten day period a group of scammers selling, what they called “asphalt paving”, were able to extort just over \$50,000 from four homeowners right here in Sumner County, Kansas. Anyone can be a victim, these people do this type of thing for a living and they are professional thieves. Please look over the following information and keep it in mind when dealing with transient merchants.

Typically these scammers will appear at your home without notice or invitation. They will point out something that they say needs attention or repair such as a metal roof that needs painting. They may offer leftover materials from a nearby job at a reduced rate such as asphalt paving. They may inquire about septic tank cleaning and ask to inspect your system. The scams these people employ are varied and numerous. The key thing to remember that is you did not recognize a problem at your home and then solicit their assistance; they just showed up at your doorstep.

Home repair scammers are always vague about estimates, amounts of materials and final costs. They will sometimes insist on money up front and then disappear without doing any work. Or, at the end of a job, the homeowner will discover that far more materials were needed than what was originally expected. Many times they will insist on cash for payment or will want the homeowner to accompany them to the bank to cash a check.

Scammers will often use high pressure tactics insisting that the work needed is of an emergency nature or that their offer is only good “here and now”. If the work is an emergency, you’ll know beforehand and if the offer is legitimate, it will be there tomorrow.

If you feel that you need home repairs consider using only local contractors to do the work. Check with family and friends for recommendations about reputable contractors that they have used in the past. Look for contractors who advertise in the yellow pages, in local newspapers or on the web.

Legitimate contractors do not feel the need to go door to door to find prospective customers. They do not normally ask for money in advance of doing the work. They will evaluate the repairs needed and give you a detailed estimate prior to starting the job. They do not normally have materials left over from a previous job that they need to get rid of right away at a bargain price.

A legitimate contractor will know of all licenses needed for any given job and will be willing to prove to you that those requirements have been met. In Sumner County, transient merchants who go door to door to sell products or services in an unsolicited manner are required to be licensed and bonded through the County Clerk’s Office. You can verify these concerns by calling the Sumner County Clerk’s Office at 620-326-3395.

If you feel you have been victimized by a transient merchant scammer, please contact law enforcement immediately. Don’t be embarrassed or feel ashamed, these people are experts at their profession and anyone can be a victim.