



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 004-15

June 16, 2015

### SPRING SCAMS

During the spring and summer months, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is frequently visited by transient criminals who travel great distances in search of victims for their various money-making scams. In many instances, their targets are the elderly. The most effective defense against scams artists is to employ some basic crime prevention tips. Two of the more prevalent scams perpetrated by transient criminals include:

**Home Repair Scams:** Victims are approached through door-to-door solicitation. The perpetrator offers to seal the victim's driveway, fix the roof, or do some other repairs at an unusually low price. Many times the perpetrator will indicate that they are "working in the area" or they have "extra materials." Typically, they will charge less if paid in cash. Upon completion, the final price is frequently much higher than the original estimate. Additionally, the materials used are typically of an inferior quality.

**Diversion Thefts/Imposter Frauds:** In this scam, criminals approach and distract a homeowner luring them toward a particular room of the house with ploys such as feigning illness, asking for a drink of water, saying they are looking for a lost pet, etc. They might also pose as a repairman from the local power company or water department in an effort to gain access to the victim's house or lure the victim out of the house. They often present an identification badge and wear what appears to be a work uniform. They will try to convince the victim that they need to test the water pressure, electrical service, or determine where the property line is and will advise that company regulations do not allow the employee to be on the property or in the house unaccompanied. Their intent is to distract the victim while unseen accomplices enter the residence and steal valuables, such as jewelry and cash. In some instances, the suspects communicate with hand-held radios or cellular telephones while committing these offenses. Some of the other less frequently used ploys include claims that the perpetrator works for a tree pruning service, driveway paving service, or fence installation company.

#### **Prevention Tips:**

- Always lock your doors when doing yard work, getting mail, or anytime you go outside - both front and back doors.
- Be careful who you let in your home. Never allow strangers inside your home, even if they appear to be in distress or with a young child.
- Check with your utility company by telephone if an employee requests to enter your home or wants you to come outside with them. If you do not see official identification, ask for it; however, criminals have become adept at making their own identification cards and each individual's identification should be verified with their respective company.
- Beware of unsolicited home repairmen. If you cannot verify the name, address, or telephone number of the repairman, they might not be reputable. If you need the services of a home repairman, work with local trade's people recommended by friends or reputable building supply stores. Request local references. Check your local phone directory, your municipality's building officials, or the Better Business Bureau to verify they are



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legitimate. Verify that the contractor is properly licensed, bonded, and insured. Per the Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act (73 P.S. §§ 517.1 *et seq*), Pennsylvania contractors who perform at least \$5,000 of home improvements per year are required to register with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office. Their paperwork must display the company's registration number that can be verified at the Pennsylvania Attorney General's website at <http://hicsearch.attorneygeneral.gov/> or by calling 1-888-520-6680.

- Be suspicious of high pressure sales tactics. Obtain written contracts describing the explicit specifications of the work, the price, the responsibility for cleaning up, and the hourly rate for any added work. Never sign a contract or agreement without carefully reviewing it. You should understand and agree to all of the contract or agreement provisions.
- Be certain the work is completed to your satisfaction before you make final payment. Require a guarantee on the work and pay by check so you can stop payment if dissatisfied.
- Write down the license plate number of any vehicles suspicious individuals may be operating. Try to obtain a good physical description of anyone who comes to your door.
- **CALL THE POLICE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY!** Never be too embarrassed to report that you might have been victimized or swindled.