

June 2008

FRAUD ALERT!

Beware of Contractor Scams and Traveling “Home Improvement” Con-Artists

Contractor Scams and Traveling “Home Improvement” con artists arrive every spring and typically prey on elderly homeowners with door-to-door roofing, paving and other scams, intimidating the consumers into paying thousands of dollars for poor quality work. *There is absolutely no reason to let strangers in your home.* Travelers often scope out the elderly at grocery stores, midweek, daytime hours, and then follow them home. Do not deal with anyone, male or female who arrives at your door after you have just returned home. In addition, female travelers often “soften up” the victim first by stating that their children need a drink or a bathroom.

How to Recognize Contractor and "Traveler" Scams

- Be wary of contractors contacting you door-to-door or by telephone, especially those offering bargains, immediate service, or using scare tactics.
- They peddle roofing, paving, tree maintenance, lawn clean-up and other repair work door-to-door.
- They drive new pick-up trucks with typically out-of-state license plates.
- They prey on the elderly using friendly, but high-pressure tactics.
- They may say they have material left over from a previous job, or insist they did work for you or a neighbor before and need to "finish the job."
- They quote bargain prices, but demand much more after the job.
- They do poor quality work -- or little or no work at all.

How to Avoid Scams

- Take time to research the contractor and/or contact the Bucks County Consumer Protection Office.
- Do not conduct business with an unlicensed contractor. Check the contractor's license with your local building department.
- Get at least three bids (and customer references). Remember, don't always choose the lowest bid, you may get what you paid for, and you may not be happy.
- Insist on a written contract that details 1) the work to be done, 2) the materials used, 3) the start date, and 4) completion date.
- Pay nothing up front, or pay only the cost of materials in advance as stated in the contract.
- Avoid high pressure sales tactics and “too good to be true” prices.
- Pay in full only when 1) the job is complete, 2) you're satisfied, 3) you've received a "lien waiver" showing the contractor has paid sub contractors and suppliers, and 4) an inspector has signed off on the job (if required).

If you have any questions or interest in scheduling an educational program, please contact a member of the Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force.

BUCKS COUNTY CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS TASK FORCE
FIGHTING ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND EXPLOITATION OF OLDER ADULTS IN BUCKS COUNTY

Bucks County District Attorney's Office 215-348-6344	Bucks County Area Agency on Aging 215-348-0510
Bucks County Consumer Protection 215-348-6060	Network of Victim Assistance 1-800-675-6900
Bucks County Register of Wills 215-348-6265	Bucks County Coroner 215-348-3852