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Photos Available

Door-To-Door Tree-Service Scams: Beware of Fraudulent “Traveler” Contractors
Why you should always demand a certified arborist when it comes to Tree Services

During this grueling economy, most people are cautiously watching each and every one of their hard-earned dollars. So, if you are in need of an arborist for your trees, it might be tempting to find the cheapest way to fix the problem. But if you're not careful, lawn and tree care scam artists, often known as Travelers, might rip you off.

According to local Consumer Protection Investigators, a common scam goes like this: A Traveler knocks on a homeowner's door, claims to be a tree service company, lawn-care company, roofing company, or other home repair service that has material left over from an earlier job or happens to be in the neighborhood. While they may be with a reputable company, sometimes they aren't associated with real companies and are out to con homeowners out of their hard-earned money. Basically they “travel” from town to town preying on unsuspecting homeowners, particularly seniors.

The con artist will then perform minimal work on trees or do nothing at all, saying they are going to get their workers. Another scam is to promise weed control in driveways, often pouring used motor oil on the property. They demand a cash payment, and move on without revealing their company's address or telephone number. Once the homeowner realizes that the work is not what they were expecting or that no work has been done, it's too late. The homeowner has been scammed and the Traveler is gone!

Travelers typically scope out more established, middle income neighborhoods where older residents live, and where mature landscapes, particularly trees, allow them unlimited opportunities to ply their trade.

“Elders are most likely to be victims of door-to-door, tree and lawn-care frauds because they are the easiest targets,” said Barbara Martin-Worley, Gerontologist, MA, and Director of the Colorado State University Denver Extension Office. “They are easily intimidated by the aggressiveness of the solicitor, and may be fearful of retribution. When they realize they have been taken in a scam, they are often ashamed and too embarrassed to admit what's been done out of fear of being judged as incompetent. For these reasons, many home repair scams against the elderly go unreported.”

Reporting known or alleged scams is critical in fighting door-to-door tree services and lawn care fraud. Travelers typically avoid going back to communities where they have

been arrested or caught. Reputable companies stand to gain by recognizing and reporting questionable business practices to the local District Attorney, Sheriff's Office, or Police Department.

The following information is provided by the Denver District Attorney's Office and the ISA-RMC on how homeowners can protect themselves against travelers. This advice is in keeping with the standards practiced by legitimate businesses in the tree, landscape, and lawn care businesses:

- Don't do business with unsolicited door-to-door contractors.
- Check with the ISA-RMC to make sure an arborist is certified. Many communities also require tree companies to be licensed, requiring their name and telephone number on all equipment.
- If the job is large—get more than one bid.
- Do insist on a written contract detailing what will be done, materials used, and start and completion dates.
- Do ask for proof of liability and workers' compensation insurance.
- Don't pay any money up front. Payments should be made by check.
- Don't pay in full until the job is complete, you're satisfied, and you've received a "lien waiver" showing the contractor has paid all sub-contractors and suppliers, and inspector has signed off on the job.
- Do get a Better Business Bureau report.

Always check out the certification of tree and lawn care services. When it comes to tree services ask if they are certified arborists complying with local and state regulations, and check with the local International Society of Arboriculture chapter ISA-RMC (www.isarmc.org for Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming) to make sure you and your trees are in the good hands of a certified arborist.

For more information visit www.isarmc.org or call the Chapter office at 303-756-1815