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Scam Alert – April 2008

by Stacie Harris, Economic Crimes Unit

Spring Has Sprung - Gypsies and Travelers

It is once again that time of the year when the weather is starting to get nice and people start making improvements and repairs on their homes.

After the hailstorm in August 2007, several roofs had to be replaced. While some had their roofs repaired immediately, others chose to wait until this Spring.

This is the time when "Gypsies" and "Travelers" start operating throughout the United States offering to do your repairs, such as Roof Coating/Repair, Asphalt Paving/Driveway Sealing, House/Barn Painting, Tree Pruning/Landscaping, and Termite/Pest Control, at a significantly reduced rate than what a legitimate business would charge. These people will ask for a deposit, or even the full amount, up front and state that they will go get the supplies and return. Some take the money and never return. Those that do return, usually provide extremely poor labor. For example: paint is watered down, paving material is applied very thin and will crumble and crack within a short time, insect spray is made up of nothing more than water and/or water and milk, roofing repair consists of spraying silver or black spray paint on the roof.

Some of these people have also been known to con their way into your homes, on the pretense of using your phone, checking for leaks from the roof, etc. While inside your home, they scout out valuables, easy items to pocket and/or your personal information. Some work in pairs that while one of them has your attention, the other is working their way through your home taking what isn't theirs. Always remember, there is no reason to let a stranger into your home

These traveling con artists tend to prey upon the elderly homeowners, although not solely upon them, with these type of door-to-door scams. Always remember:

- Don't do business with door-to-door contractors.
- Keep **all** doors, including the garage door, closed and locked at all times, especially when you are outside working in the yard.
- Install security doors with metal grillwork and key locks instead of latched screen doors.
- Don't hide keys under the doormat or rocks.
- Secure sliding glass doors with anti-slide block or slide bolt.

It may cost you more to hire someone from a reputable business that has been checked out with the Better Business Bureau, but you at least have a better sense of who you're dealing with, and possible recourse if the job is not done correctly. Make sure you actually call and verify the business with the Better Business Bureau at (866)206-1800.

~IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU!!~