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Scam Alert – April 2009

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Springtime Fraudsters - Gypsies and Travelers

Springtime. It's that time of year where the flowers are blooming, grass starts growing, and everyone wants to make home improvements. It's also the time of year when the "Gypsies" and "Travelers" come out of their winter retirement and start operating throughout the United States offering to do your repairs for a very minimal fee. The difference between a gypsy and traveler is the location of where they originate from. Their similarity is only to take your money and run.

The con starts when one knocks on your door and offers to do repairs around your home. These could be Roof Coating/Repair, Asphalt Paving/Driveway Sealing, House/Barn Painting, Tree Pruning/Landscaping, and Termite/Pest Control, just to name a few. They offer to do the work and charge you less than what a reputable local company would charge you. The idea of paying less money is always a welcoming thought, but with everyone struggling to get through our current economic situation, it is more prevalent than ever.

Hiring someone that is just passing through can prove to be a disastrous decision. These people usually 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 look for valuables, easy items to pocket and/or your personal information. Some work in pairs. 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 ever let a stranger into your home.

Traveling con artists tend to prey upon the elderly homeowners, although not solely upon them.

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Always remember:

- Don't do business with door-to-door contractors. Just because they pulled up in front of your house in a fancy truck with advertising decals on the doors does not mean that they are a reputable business. It could mean that they are that good of a con artist.
- Keep **all** doors, including the garage door, closed and locked at all times, especially when you are outside working in the yard. It may seem like more of a hassle to keep unlocking the door every time you need to enter, but if you stepped away from the front of the house to retrieve something in the backyard, that's all the time they need to gain access to your home.
- 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 in the long run 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. Also, do not rely on the phone book advertisements that show that a company is a member of the Better Business Bureau. Make sure you actually call and verify the business with the Better Business Bureau at (866)206-1800 or you may access their website at www.bbb.org.

IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU