

PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Department of Consumer Protection Finds 62 Unregistered Businesses Offering Home Improvement and In-Home Services

HARTFORD, June 30 – Fifty-four home improvement contractors and salespersons will pay a fine or face criminal and /or administrative penalties for not being registered with the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection as required by state law, Consumer Protection Commissioner Jerry Farrell, Jr. said today. He spoke at a press conference marking the conclusion of a five-month undercover operation, which also netted three unregistered locksmiths and five unregistered homemaker companion agencies.

“The number one consumer complaint in Connecticut each year is still home improvement, so we take our enforcement role very seriously,” Farrell said. “This is our ninth ‘sting house,’ and we’ll continue to pursue this issue until contractors get the message that working without a registration is a punishable offense.” Previous sting house operations were conducted in Plainville, Ridgefield, Wilton, West Haven, Bristol, Montville, Enfield and Waterbury.

Farrell noted that for the first time, this year’s operation included a check on locksmiths and home companion agencies. Three locksmiths and five homemaker companion agencies responded to invitations from the Department’s undercover investigators to bid on work at the house. All eight businesses were unregistered in Connecticut, and therefore working outside the law, Farrell said.

“Connecticut’s registration requirements for locksmiths began in 2008, and in 2006 for homemaker companion agencies,” Farrell said. “The registration process offers safeguards for anyone hiring these in-home service providers, and therefore is not to be skirted or overlooked.”

Homemaker-companion agencies provide non-medical support services at a person’s home. State law requires every homemaker-companion agency to certify that it conducts comprehensive background checks on employees, provides clients with a written individualized contract or service plan, and that it maintains a surety bond.

When registering, locksmiths are required to submit a criminal history record, and may be refused registration based upon the record.

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During the months-long operation, the Department's Trade Practices investigators collaborated with the Bloomfield Police Department., using as their base of operations a State-owned, vacant house at 26 Marguerite Avenue in Bloomfield. Posing as homeowners, investigators contacted area contractors, locksmiths, and homemaker companion agencies that had been suspected of working without registration, and invited them to bid on work.

The 54 unregistered home improvement contractors and/or salespersons are from Bloomfield, Windsor, Hartford, Torrington, North Haven, Manchester, West Hartford, Meriden, Redding, East Granby, New Britain, Waterbury and several other Connecticut towns, and from Worcester and Ludlow, Massachusetts. They offered work such as roofing, painting, masonry, hanging sheet rock, replacing ceilings, building a porch enclosure, driveway paving, landscaping, fencing, shelving, finishing hardwood floors, and installing carpet, cabinets and windows.

"The Home Builders Association of Connecticut applauds the Department's strong enforcement of the state's contractor registration law," said Bill Ethier, the Association's Chief Executive Officer. "Consumers deserve the benefits and protections provided by these laws, and law-abiding contractors deserve the level playing field brought about by strong enforcement." The Home Builders Association of Connecticut represents home builders and home improvement contractors in Connecticut.

The unregistered home improvement contractors, salespersons, locksmiths and homemaker companion agencies caught in the sting have been notified by mail and fined. Contractors, salespersons and homemaker companion agencies that don't pay the fine face criminal charges of up to one year in jail. Locksmiths face administrative sanctions if they do not pay their fines.

The house on Marguerite Avenue was also the site of a joint enforcement effort responding to allegations of insurance fraud. Representatives from National Insurance Crime Bureau and Bloomfield Police Department collaborated with DCP in this effort. Details of this operation and outcome will be made available in July.

Commissioner Farrell thanked his staff and recognized several others who collaborated with the Department on this operation: Acting Bloomfield Police Chief Captain Jeffery Blatter, Detective Sergeant Shawn Bolden, Connecticut Department of Transportation Supervising Property Agent Amy Martinez, National Insurance Crime Bureau Director of Operations Keith Carlough, and Supervisory Special Agent John Gasiorek.

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The Department of Consumer Protection administers a Home Improvement Guaranty Fund for consumers who suffer construction damage or problems as a result of work done by a *registered* home improvement contractor. Persons whose situations qualify may receive restitution from the fund up to \$15,000 per contract.

Consumers who have questions or concerns about their home improvement contractor or project, locksmiths, homemaker companion agencies, or who seek information about the Home Improvement Guaranty Fund may call the Department at (860) 713-6110, toll-free at 1-800-842-2649, or visit the agency website at www.ct.gov/dcp.

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