

Home Improvement Sting House Nets 44 Unregistered Contractors and Salespersons

Forty-four home improvement contractors and salespersons face administrative penalties for not being registered with the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection as required by the Connecticut Home Improvement Act, or for violating the Home Solicitation Sales Act, Consumer Protection Commissioner William M. Rubenstein said today. The Commissioner spoke this afternoon at a press conference marking the conclusion of a three-month undercover operation at an unoccupied Waterford house.

“Although the law has required that home improvement contractors and salespeople register with the Department for more than 20 years, we still find individuals trying to skirt this law,” Rubenstein said. “In terms of volume and cost, the highest-ranking consumer complaint in Connecticut and nationally each year is home improvement. Problems that come up routinely cost consumers thousands of dollars to correct; that’s why we take our home improvement laws so seriously. While the number of unregistered contractors is still too high, it appears that compliance is improving, and our education and outreach is paying off.”

During the three-month operation, several of the Department’s Trade Practices investigators used an empty house at 345 Rope Ferry Road in Waterford that had been made available for this purpose by the State Department of Transportation. Posing as homeowners, the undercover investigators contacted area contractors suspected of working without registrations and invited them to bid on various projects.

Investigators reviewed 217 ads from contractors, and those contractors who visited the house submitted bids and contracts for projects including roofing, carpentry, interior and exterior painting, hardwood floors, carpet installation, kitchen cabinets, sheet rock, ceiling repair, driveway paving, landscaping, shutters, fencing and gutters.

The 44 unregistered home improvement contractors and salespersons identified during this operation were as follows: Foster Construction Inc., East Lyme; Marc's Painting (Marcos Hernandez), Groton; RF Landscaping Service (Rene Flores), Ledyard; Tim's Lawn Care (Timothy Tryon), New London; Richard Columbe Renewed Properties, New London; the Greek Gardener (Cheryl Pappas), New London.

Also, Alpha Aero (Linda Bruckner), Niantic; Nadar Salahi Kitchen & Bath Outlet, Norwich; East Coast Maintenance (Chris Gates), Norwich; Painting with a Woman's Touch (Donna Lott), Old Lyme; Dudley Landscaping LLC, Taftville; B&D Home Improvement LLC, Waterford; Dennis Schermerhorn, Waterford; Advanced Paving Co. LLC, Waterford; Acres of Care Landscaping LLC, Waterford; A n' D Landscaping (Derek Dyer), Waterford; Tiger Construction (Garry Perrelli), Waterford, and Carlos R. Monge, Waterford.

“In addition to being registered, the law requires that home improvement contractors provide consumers with a clearly-worded written contract that includes a three-day notice of cancellation and that they include their home improvement registration numbers in their contracts and in all their advertising. Many contractors fail to do this consistently,” Rubenstein said. “We want contractors to comply fully with all provisions of the Home Improvement Act, since this protects consumers and ensures a fair marketplace.”

The 44 unregistered contractors have been notified that they must register with the Department, and charged a civil penalty of \$250.

“In Connecticut, failure to register as a home improvement contractor or salesperson is a criminal offense, and we are prepared to use this enforcement measure when needed,” Rubenstein said.

“The Department’s ongoing efforts to enforce the state’s contractor registration law are important in educating both consumers and contractors,” Bill Ethier, Chief Executive Officer of the Home Builders Association of Connecticut said. “Consumers deserve the benefits that the law provides, and contractors who abide by the law deserve the level playing field that strong enforcement fosters.” The Home Builders Association represents home builders and home improvement contractors in Connecticut.

Working with a properly-registered contractor is critical for consumers in order to have legal and financial protections, the Commissioner added. The Department administers a Home Improvement Guaranty Fund for consumers who suffer construction damage or problems as a result of work done, only by registered home

improvement contractors. Homeowners who qualify for the fund may receive restitution up to \$15,000 per contract.

The Commissioner thanked his staff for their work and expressed appreciation to William Dorn of the Connecticut Department of Transportation for his ongoing assistance with identifying suitable home sites for the compliance operation. This is the Department's 11th such operation; previous undercover efforts were conducted in Wilton, West Haven, Bristol, Montville, Enfield, Waterbury, Plainville and Bloomfield.

Consumers who have questions or concerns about their home improvement contractor or project, 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. To verify whether a contractor is registered, select "verify a license" from the home page, center menu and follow the prompts.