



Shut the Door on Door-to-Door Home Improvement Scams

From the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson

While “Marcy” was gardening in her front yard, a man approached. He told her he could repave her driveway at a “bargain price” if she paid cash today. She paid the money, and the man promised to return with a crew the next day to do the work. He never came back.

Maybe your neighborhood has seen the scam: an unknown salesman travels from house to house offering to fix up homes or driveways at rock-bottom prices. He may give a reason why his prices are so low, such as claiming to have supplies left over from another project in your neighborhood. What scammers never tell you is the “catch”: if you pay up front, they may run off with your money, leave the work undone, do shoddy work, or overcharge you in the end.

Door-to-door scams increase in warm weather, and some scammers go from town to town ripping people off. These are some precautions to guard against these scams.

Driveway Pavement Scams

Fraudsters sometimes stop at homes that have older, unpaved or cracked driveways. They use the condition of the driveway as a pressure point, suggesting that the driveway should look more like the driveways of their neighbors or indicating that a better driveway would raise the consumer’s home value. Scammers may try to pressure a homeowner to make a snap decision before they have time to shop around, often by claiming that the “bargain” offer is only available if they act now. Fraudulent operators may be quick to disappear if a homeowner pays up front.

Home Improvement Scams

With this scam, a crooked person may offer to fix a window, repair a roof, or paint a house. These scam artists can be very aggressive. If a homeowner pays for the work up front, the scammer may skip town, refuse to honor the deal, perform shoddy work, or stick

the homeowner with an inflated bill. If the homeowner makes a partial payment up front, the scammer may do some limited work to get the homeowner to pay additional funds, before the fraudster skips town.

Security Alarm Scams

Each summer, traveling crews come to Minnesota to sign people up for security alarms. Scammers may get their foot in the door by telling you the alarm is “free” or discounted or that they are with your current alarm company. They may scare you by talking about crime in your neighborhood. They may ask you to sign a contract whose print is so small you can’t even read it. In some cases, people have signed contracts requiring them to pay as much as \$50 per month for five years for a security alarm that doesn’t work or that they don’t need. If you want a security alarm, the best advice is to ask friends and family for references and then research those businesses.

Tips To Avoid Door-To-Door Home Improvement Scams

- **Don’t Fall for Pressure Tactics.** Door-to-door home improvement scams try to trick you into acting immediately, before you have time to shop around. Legitimate companies that want your business will generally allow you time to think about the offer, research your options, and shop around. Red flags should go up if a door-to-door salesman pressures you to make an immediate decision or pay cash in advance.
- **Ask for Identification and Research the Business.** You should carefully research any business before allowing it to work in your home. Ask for state or local license or permit information and information on whether the person is bonded. Under Minnesota law, door-to-door salespeople must clearly disclose their name, the name of the business they represent

and the goods or services they wish to sell, as well as an identification card with the sales person's name and the name of the business to any potential buyer.

- **Contact the Department of Labor and Industry and Your Local Government.** Most residential building contractors must be licensed by the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry. Many municipalities also require contractors or door-to-door salespeople to hold a permit or license. Contact your local city, municipality or county for more information on local regulations. Contact the Department of Labor and Industry as follows:

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

443 Lafayette Road North

St Paul, MN 55155

651-284-5010 or 800-342-5354

www.doli.state.mn.us

- **Beware of Missing Information.** Scam artists tend to use generic business names and only include a phone number on any written materials. They may drive unmarked cars or trucks. If a salesman declines to provide you with identification or other basic information, it is probably best to end the conversation.
- **Take Your Time and Shop Around.** If you would like to pursue a home improvement project, ask for references from friends and neighbors who have undertaken similar projects. The best recommendations often come from people you trust who have direct experience with a contractor. Consider asking several companies to provide you with bids.

- **Document and Read Offers and Estimates.** Carefully read any contract before you sign it. Beware of fine print that requires you to pay more than a quoted price or that obligates you to pay for unwanted services that you did not discuss with the contractor. Ask the representative to leave the contract with you for review before you sign it.
- **Put Your Personal Safety First.** Don't let unknown salesmen inside your home. Scammers can be very aggressive. If you let them inside your home, they may sit down on your couch--or even your bed--and refuse to leave until you sign a contract.
- **Turn Away if You Have an Uneasy Feeling.** Listen to your instincts. If you have an uneasy feeling about a door-to-door operator, just say "no" and shut the door. Con artists can be persuasive: the longer you allow them to talk to you, the greater the opportunity they see to sweet talk you into making a decision you might regret. Don't continue to engage with a salesman who you have already turned down.

If you suspect a door-to-door scam is occurring in your neighborhood, promptly notify local law enforcement.

For more information, contact the Minnesota Attorney General's Office as follows:

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