

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE
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SPRING TIME SCAMS

During the spring and summer months, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania unfortunately plays host to transient criminals who travel great distances in search of victims for their various money-making scams. In many cases, their targets are the elderly. Our greatest defense against these scam artists is the sharing of some basic crime prevention tips.

Some of the more prevalent scams perpetrated by transient criminals include:

Home Repair Scams Victims are approached through door-to-door solicitation, and the suspects advise they have been working in the area and noticed the victim's roof, driveway, barn, etc. are in need of repair or maintenance. The suspects say they have left over material (paint, asphalt, etc.) from a previous job and can make the repairs for a very low price. Once the job is completed, the suspects provide a bill that is significantly higher than the original quotation and provide various reasons as to why the price changed. Further, the materials used are typically of an inferior quality.

Sweetheart Swindle - This scam is relatively common, and typically involves a young, female who befriends an elderly male. The female weaves a story about having a sewing business and asks if the victim will invest in the company. After gaining money through this ruse, the next request often involves more money for expensive medical procedures for the female or a member of her family. This is a scam that has been known to last for days, months, or even years.

Home Invasion Thefts / Burglaries - In this scam, transient criminals approach and distract a homeowner, luring them toward a particular room of the house with various ruses such as feigning illness, asking for a drink of water, etc. These criminals will also pose as legitimate repairman from the local cable / power company or water department as well as home repair workers (see above) and will approach elderly homeowners in an effort to gain access into their house. While distracting the homeowner, unseen accomplices enter the residence and steal valuables such as jewelry, silver, and cash.

Prevention Tips:

- Always lock your doors when doing yard work, getting mail, or anytime you go outside - both front and back doors.
- Never allow strangers inside your home.
- Check with the utility company by telephone if an employee wants to enter your home, or wants you to come outside with them. If you do not see any identification, ask for it, however, these criminals have become adept at making their own IDs and each individual's identification should be verified with their respective company.
- Beware of unsolicited home repairmen. If you need the services of a home repairman, check with your municipality's building officials or the Better Business Bureau to make sure they are legitimate. Verify that the contractor is properly licensed, bonded, and insured.
- Be suspicious of high pressure sales tactics.
- Pay by check so you can stop payment if dissatisfied. Further, make sure the salesperson has provided you with the proper "notice of cancellation" form as required under the Federal Trade Commission's "Three Day Cooling off Rule" for contracts signed in the home. Under the Cooling-Off Rule, you have three days to cancel purchases made of \$25.00 or more when the sale occurred in your home, workplace/ dormitory, or at facilities rented by the seller on a temporary or short-term basis.
- Be sure the work is completed to your satisfaction before you make final payment. Require a guarantee on the work.
- Never sign any contract or agreement without carefully checking it. Be sure you understand and agree to all provisions in a contract or agreement.
- Write down the plate number of any suspicious vehicle they may be operating. Try and get a good physical description of anyone who comes to your door.
- **CALL THE POLICE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY!** Never be too embarrassed to report that you've been victimized or swindled.

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