

A little skepticism helps guard against con artists

By Kim Kemske
special writer

A deal that sounds too good to be true probably is.

It is most likely a con game or scheme to take your money and give back little or nothing in return.

While people over age 65 make up only 12 percent of the population, they constitute about 30 percent of scam victims. Often the victims of such plays are older women, but con artists will try their tactics on anyone.

Most of us think that we couldn't be tricked into paying out our hard-earned money for "phony deals," but con artists are experts in psychology and human behavior. Their smooth talk and self-assured manner can win your confidence and, before you know it, your money, too.

To protect yourself from swindlers,



you should be on the lookout for common consumer frauds and read the papers to find out about any new

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plays being used in your area.

One of the many ways to watch out for is the Home Repair/Inspection

Fraud. In this scheme, an individual offers to do a repair or inspection on-the-spot because the crew is working in the neighborhood and they have leftover materials from another job in the area. You will often be quoted a very low price for an expensive job or be lead to believe that you need expensive repairs which are really not necessary. The person often will take your money and do nothing, or do the job incorrectly or with inferior materials.

TO AVOID becoming a victim, always get several estimates for a repair or improvement job, and compare prices and terms. Get estimates, and any other contracts, thoroughly before signing them. If you don't understand something you read, ask for clarification or call a friend, neighbor or your attorney for their opinion.

Check to see if there is a charge

for estimates. Ask friends for recommendations and check with past customers or the Better Business Bureau before signing a contract. Be suspicious of high-pressure sales tactics and one-time-only deals.

Arrange to make installment payments: one-third at the beginning of the job, one-third when the job is near completion, and the balance when the work is done. Pay by check, not cash, and make sure you get a written guarantee.

Legitimate companies are injured, too, when con artists imitate their sales methods. Learn to sort the bad apple from the good to protect yourself from scams.

If it happens to you, don't be too embarrassed to make a police report, or think that the police can't do anything to help. Your police report can help to prevent others from being victimized, and, maybe, put

the con artist in jail. Other things you can do include:

- Inform your Neighborhood Watch or subdivision association of any known or suspected con games in the area.

- Call your consumer protection agency and the local newspapers if you think you're a victim of fraud. Work with the police and other agencies by providing any information you have about what occurred, the persons involved, etc.

- Contact the Better Business Bureau to help you resolve the complaint.

- Contact your local postmaster if you think you're a victim of mail fraud.

You don't have to be conned. Just be alert.

Kim Kemske is a crime prevention technician with the Farmington Hills Police Department.

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

LARCENY ATTEMPTS

Two Farmington restaurants and a Livonia butcher shop were visited by a man Aug. 13 who police believe was attempting to fraudulently obtain refunds.

According to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report,

the man visited the A & W restaurant, 22004 Farmington Road, and the Kowalski store at 22030 Farmington Road in the mid-afternoon hours. At the A & W, he told employees he had become ill from eating food and demanded a refund. At the Kowalski store, he asked for a refund on 5 pounds of dip, saying it had a hair in it. In neither case did he physically return the product.

As he visited the Kowalski store, an employee of the Butcher Block

store on Farmington Road just south of Eight Mile called to warn employees there the same man had just attempted the same thing at their Livonia store.

According to police, a Kowalski employee recalled the man coming in and obtaining a \$15 refund in July after complaining of an alleged problem.

Police are seeking warrants charging a 38-year-old Westland man.

TRESPASSERS STOPPED

Three youths were stopped and ticketed early the morning of Aug. 15, after they were seen on the roof of Flanders Elementary School, 32900 Flanders, Farmington.

According to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report, the three were on the roof for about 5-10 minutes. There was no damage.

They were stopped leaving the scene and ticketed for trespassing. Two were 16-year-olds and the other a 17-

year-old. All were from the Farmington area.

THEFTS REPORTED

Some \$250 in rolled coins was stolen Aug. 14 from Kitts Tools, 27600 Eight Mile, Farmington Hills, Aug. 14. Two prior break-ins were reported with similar methods of operation, police said.

A thief took off with nearly \$15,000 worth of property following

a break-in at a Halsted residence in the Hills Aug. 14. Among the items stolen were \$2,200 cash, a crystal ashtray and lighter, gold chains and a VCR.

A Greenhill Street resident reported \$785 in property stolen from his 1988 Ford T-Bird Aug. 15. Hills police observed three subjects cruising apartments and condo complexes on Nine Mile Road, looking into vehicles with small flashlights.

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