

July 8, 2005

## **STENEHJEM OBTAINS COURT ORDER HALTING FRAUDULENT VACUUM SALES TO ELDERLY VICTIMS**

BISMARCK – A Bismarck man has been sentenced to six months in the county jail for fraudulent vacuum cleaner sales in North Dakota. Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem brought the action against Terry Gourneau after Gourneau violated an agreement last year to discontinue sales in North Dakota. “Based on complaints received by our Consumer Protection Division, Mr. Gourneau made a practice of targeting elderly victims, arriving uninvited at their homes and not leaving until he sold a vacuum cleaner at several times over retail value,” Stenehjem said.

All of the complaints were from consumers over the age of 65 and half were 80 years or older. “Mr. Gourneau intimidated his victims, who often felt that he would not leave until they wrote a check,” said Stenehjem. “Mr. Gourneau also misled elderly consumers into believing they were buying new machines when he actually recycled trade-ins from previous unlawful sales. He also failed to notify consumers of their right to cancel the sale within 15 days, which is required under state law.”

District Court Judge Bruce Romanick found Gourneau in contempt of court and granted Gourneau credit for 11 days of jail time already served. Judge Romanick suspended the remainder of the six month jail term on the condition that Gourneau cease all sales in North Dakota and make payment of \$6,000 to the Attorney General.

“I will not tolerate these fraudulent and abusive sales practices directed at our elderly consumers, and I’m very pleased the Court recognized the seriousness of Mr. Gourneau’s illegal conduct,” Stenehjem said. Assistant attorney general Todd Sattler of the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division handled the case. Consumers with questions may contact the Consumer Protection Division at 701-328-3404, or toll-free at 1-800-472-2600.