

July 7, 2005

ATTORNEY GENERAL AND SECRETARY OF STATE WARN DICKINSON HOMEOWNERS OF UNLICENSED CONTRACTORS

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem and Secretary of State Al Jaeger remind homeowners of the need for caution when hiring contractors to complete home repairs. Severe weather damage provides an opportunity for a variety of different home repair scams to surface. Door-to-door repair operators and out-of-state contractors may seem attractive at first because they usually do not have a long waiting list.

“Many transient operators are scam artists looking for the next victim. Don’t make it easy for them.” said Stenehjem. “A reputable local company will be around later if you have problems, and that alone may be worth the wait. Stenehjem continued, “If you absolutely can’t wait, be careful.”

If a contractor or door-to-door operator is not from the Dickinson area, they may be required to have a "Transient Merchant License," issued by the Attorney General's office, and also to post a bond. If there is a problem with a transient merchant's product or service, the consumer can file a claim against the bond.

In addition, contractors doing a job for more than \$2,000 must have a contractor's license. “For your protection, before hiring anyone make sure the contractor is properly licensed,” Jaeger said. Consumers may contact the Licensing Division at 701-328-2900 to verify a contractor's license.

Stenehjem advises property owners to be on the look-out for signs of fraud, including:

- Arrival in an unmarked van or truck;
- Someone who comes to the door and claims to have “just finished a job” helping a neighbor and can now give a great price because there are materials left over;
- High pressure sales practices or threats such as “this price is available today only”;
- Requiring payment in full before the work is done “to get a fantastic discount”;
- An offer of discounts for finding other customers;
- Refusing to provide references, or proof of required licenses and insurance.

For more information about transient merchant or consumer fraud issues, contact the Consumer Protection Division of the Office of Attorney General, at (701) 328-3404 or toll free at 1-800-472-2600.