

## NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Liz Brocker  
(701) 328-2213

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### **BUSINESS INVOICE SCAMS SURFACE AGAIN**

#### **Cease & Desist Orders issued against Canadian Companies YAPB (aka YAPD), Yellow Book, and 411 YP List**

BISMARCK, ND – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem today issued Cease and Desist Orders against three Canadian companies that were engaging in deceptive business practices by operating “business invoice” scams. The companies and their principals, **YAPB (aka YAPD) and Dany Villeneuve, Yellow Book and Mario Klemp, and 411 YP List**, are banned from doing business in North Dakota.

According to Stenehjem the “business invoice” scams typically involve an initial phone call to the business to obtain key information about the business, or an invoice via mail. The scammers create fictitious invoices, websites and publications using the Yellow pages name and logo, and can be relentless, even threatening, when trying to collect payment. They often claim to have a recording that proves authorization for the listing.

“These phony invoices look official and they often are very similar in appearance to legitimate business telephone listing services. Employees may unwittingly approve them and process payment assuming the invoice is for a legitimate directory service or was previously approved by another individual,” Stenehjem said.

The Consumer Protection Division initiated the separate investigations after receiving complaints from businesses that had received invoices for phony yellow page listings or telephone calls from the banned companies attempting to collect payment for the supposed yellow page listings.

The companies are all located in Montreal, Quebec. Although two of the companies used a mail drop address in the United States, apparently in an effort to appear legitimate, investigators quickly determined that mail received at those US addresses was simply forwarded to the Canadian offices. The three companies and their principals would not cooperate with investigators and refused to respond to an Order to Produce Information issued by the Consumer Protection Division.

The Cease & Desist Orders prohibit the individual companies and their principals from conducting any further solicitations or advertising in the state. The Orders also bar them from taking or collecting any payments from the fraudulent invoices.

In 2010 and 2012, Stenehjem took action against other Canadian companies that also were operating business invoice scams relating to phony yellow page listings, banning them from doing business in the state.

“These business invoice scams resurface frequently because they work,” said Parrell Grossman, director of the Consumer Protection division. “Businesses often receive multiple statements or invoices for advertising services, and scam artists thrive on the confusion they can create with these phony invoices.” Grossman recommended that businesses designate one individual who is responsible for authorizing invoices and cross-checking payments.

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