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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
January 20, 2022

Four arrested in Paradise for Contracting without a License

A multi-agency investigation involving Butte County District Attorney Investigators, Paradise Police and the California Contractors State Licensing Board (CSLB), led to multiple felony arrests yesterday of unlicensed contractors operating on the Paradise Ridge.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey announced today that his office has been working with several state and local agencies after receiving complaints of unlicensed contractor activity occurring on the Ridge. In the aftermath of the Camp Fire, the town of Paradise has seen an obvious increase in contractor activity. Ramsey said while the majority of contractors maintain all required licenses and insurances, some individuals attempt to skirt the laws meant to protect consumers.

Ramsey said that the operation carried out yesterday focused on unlicensed activity, and led to the arrest of four individuals who held themselves out to be contractors, but are not licensed through the state.

Gustavo Noriega, 30, of Live Oak and Josiah Westby, 35, of Paradise were arrested for contracting without a license and released on \$15,000 bail. Zachary Green, 36, of Oroville was arrested for contracting without a license and later cited to appear. All three are scheduled to appear in Butte County Superior Court April 8, 2022. None have any record of holding a contractor's license.

Terry Sumpter, 43, of Corning was arrested for contracting without a license, two counts of possession of controlled substance, and one count of possession of drug paraphernalia. Sumpter remains in jail in lieu of \$22,000 bail and will appear in court tomorrow, January 21, 2022. Sumpter has never held a contractor's license.

Ramsey said he understands the pressure and stress those affected by the Camp Fire feel in trying to rebuild and move forward with their lives. The lack of resources, lack of available licensed contractors and increasing costs only aggravate those emotions. Unlicensed contractors, however use those emotions to get building contracts, and often leave their clients with poor quality work, or in some instances, no work at all. Licensed contractors are required to have a bond to commit to completion of their work.

Unlicensed contractors, who do not pay worker's compensation insurance and other fees, are able to underbid licensed contractors, who are following the law. Ramsey said his office and Paradise Police are currently working other contractor fraud investigations.

”It is important we do everything we can to protect the hardworking contractors who are trying to do it right.” Ramsey said. The joint effort is also aimed at protecting the citizens of Paradise as they try to rebuild and reestablish their lives. While these investigations are technical and complicated, both Paradise Police and the District Attorney’s Office are committed to review any complaint for potential criminal activity.

Ramsey said he urges citizens to research their potential contractors through the CSLB website <https://www.cslb.ca.gov/onlineservices/checklicenseII/checklicense.aspx> for the current license status and worker’s compensation insurance coverage. Ramsey also said it is important that potential homeowners know their rights and protections when using a contractor- such as not fully paying for services prior to completion.

If anyone has any questions or concerns regarding what is lawful or not, Ramsey encouraged them to reach out to his Investigations Bureau at dafraud@buttecounty.net, or the Paradise Police Department at their non-emergency number (530) 872-6241.

CSLB has provided a helpful informational video to watch prior to hiring a contractor, which can be found at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sish_2o1DLQ.