



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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Statewide “California Blitz” Sting Comes to Chico

The Contractors State License Board’s (CSLB) Statewide Investigative Fraud Team (SWIFT) teamed with investigators from the Butte County District Attorney’s Office as part of its spring “California Blitz” that included two-day sting operations in seven cities from Chico to San Bernardino. The sting conducted at a private home in Chico produced 6 of the 77 state-wide notices to appear in court during the March 13-14, 2013 operation.

CSLB investigators invited suspected unlicensed contractors to bid on landscaping, tree removal, fencing, and painting. The suspects were advertising for contracting services in local newspapers, on Craig’s list and by posting business cards or flyers at local home improvement stores. Those who bid more than \$500 for labor and materials at the Chico house were issued a notice to appear for contracting without a license.

Many homeowners are unaware of the serious financial loss and risk of worker injury on their property, including potential liability for injuries sustained by laborers not covered by workers’ compensation insurance. Many also do not know that it is illegal to solicit or accept a down payment larger than 10 percent of the contract price, or \$1,000, whichever is less, for a home improvement contract.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said, “Homeowners need to be aware of the risk they take when they hire someone who is not licensed to do work in their home. What seems like a good deal almost always ends up costing a lot more. Many of these phony contractors are people you really don’t want inside your house or around your family.”

Ramsey said that compliance sweeps and stings are conducted periodically in order prevent unscrupulous, unlicensed contractors from underbidding contractors who have followed all regulations including obtaining appropriate licensing and insurance.

In addition to Chico, the two-day undercover stings took place in Orange (Orange County), Lawndale (Los Angeles County), San Bernardino (San Bernardino County), Oakdale (Stanislaus County), and Bakersfield (Kern County).

“CSLB is gratified for its partnership with the Butte County District Attorney and prosecutors’ offices throughout the state to achieve our goals of the "California Blitz" including drawing attention to these consumer protection laws, educating unlicensed workers about contractor license law, and encouraging those who qualify to obtain their contractor license,” said CSLB Registrar Steve Sands.

CSLB urges consumers to follow these tips before hiring anyone to work on their property:

- Look for the contractor’s state license number. California law requires it to be in all forms of advertising.
- If the contractor does not have a state license, the ad must state that fact.
- In California, unlicensed people cannot do work on jobs valued at \$500.00 or more (combined labor and materials).
- Do not be misled by unlicensed contractors who give you a business or “handyman” license number.
- Before you call anyone for a bid, check the license number on CSLB’s website at www.cslb.ca.gov or www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com to make sure the license is in good standing, and the contractor has workers’ compensation insurance coverage for employees.
- Contractors are required to have their plastic pocket license or Home Improvement Salesperson registration card with them. Ask to see it when getting your bid.
- Ask to see a photo ID to verify the person’s identity.
- Get at least three bids, check references and previous work, and get a detailed written contract.
- Do not pay more than 10 percent or \$1,000.00, whichever is less, as a down payment.
- Do not pay in cash and do not let payments get ahead of the work.

The Contractors State License Board operates under the umbrella of the California [Department of Consumer Affairs](#). More information and publications about hiring contractors are available on the CSLB website or by calling 800-321-CSLB (2752). You also can sign up for [CSLB email alerts](#). CSLB licenses and regulates California's 300,000 contractors, and is regarded as one of the leading consumer protection agencies in the United States. In fiscal year 2010-11, CSLB helped recover nearly \$45 million in ordered restitution for consumers.

The following people made bids in excess of \$500.00 for contracting services, were determined to be unlicensed and were cited for contracting without a license and illegal

advertising, both misdemeanors:

- Laslo Szontagh, 36, Chico was cited for bidding \$1,200.00 to paint the exterior of the residence. His bid was for labor only, asking the homeowner to purchase the paint. Szontagh was identified through his advertisement in a local periodical.
- Guillermo Serrano Tejas, 46, Chico was cited for bidding more than \$500.00 for landscaping services. Tejas was identified through a Craigslist ad.
- Andrew Louis Colenzo, Jr., 52, Paradise was cited for bidding \$1,300.00 to build an iron gate/fence. Colenzo was identified through his business card which was posted at a local home improvement store.
- Herod Fred Miller, 33, Oroville was cited for bidding \$850.00 to remove 3 to 4 trees from the property. Miller was identified through a Craigslist ad for tree removal.
- Jeffrey Gerald Steels, 48, of Oroville was cited for bidding \$800.00 to \$1000.00 to paint the exterior of the residence. Steele was identified through his business card posted at a local hardware store.
- Juan Carlos Rodriguez, 31, Palermo was cited for bidding more than \$500.00 for landscaping services. Rodriguez was identified through his advertisement on Craigslist.