

Scam Artist – No more

Human Services Spotlight Series #16

Between 2016 and 2018, a Pinellas County man purported to be a licensed Air Conditioning Contractor by advertising via Craig’s List, roadside ads and self-promotion. Because of the advertising, he was contacted by four Pinellas County residents for various A/C repair and installation jobs. Each time, he met with the victims at their homes, he reviewed their request and provided an estimate and contract for work to be completed the next day. Each of the victims provided a 50% down payment ranging from \$500 to \$2,150.

In one incident, the defendant arrived at the residence and began to conduct the work. A neighbor, who looked out for the elderly, blind victim, interrupted the work and ordered the man to leave.

During the other three incidents, the defendant failed to show at the residence to perform the work. Each time, the victims repeatedly asked him to conduct the work or provide a refund. The defendant provided one victim a refund of \$500 via a personal check, but quickly placed a “stop payment” on it. The defendant provided another victim a refund of \$1,000 via personal check, but the bank account was already closed. The defendant sent the third victim a text message advising he would only return the money if the complaint was dropped.



The victims made complaints to Pinellas County Consumer Protection who conducted the multi-victim investigation which revealed the defendant was not licensed and did not work for the companies he advertised to the victims. The defendant pled guilty to the following charges:

Tampering with a Witness; Scheme to Defraud; Grand Theft from a

person 65 or older;
Exploitation of an elderly or disabled adult; Failure to Secure Worker’s Comp;
Unlicensed AC Contracting–State;
Falsely Holding oneself out as a contractor license; Commence Construction w/o permit and Grand Theft.

Due to prior similar offenses the defendant was ordered to pay \$1,100 in restitution and was sentenced to 27.45 month in prison, followed by 18 months of probation.

Protect
Regulate
Investigate
Educate

Sometimes it is hard to spot fraud when it is happening. Scams can be large or small, sophisticated or simple, but the people behind them have two things in common: They want to steal your money and avoid being caught. The reality is anyone could fall victim to a scam, no matter your age, intellect or economic status. Most consumer transactions are completed satisfactorily. On occasion, however, any consumer could experience unresolved problems such as defective products, erroneous bills or non-delivery of goods or services.

When you are confronted with such a situation, the dedicated employees of Pinellas County Consumer Protection are here to assist you. Investigators are available to speak with you regarding a consumer transaction at (727) 464-6200.

consumer@pinellascounty.org

Doing Things for You!

For more information, visit us online at www.pinellascounty.org