

Sting snares unlicensed contractors in El Dorado County

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Eleven people have been accused of contracting without a license following an undercover sting operation Saturday at a house in El Dorado Hills.

The operation was conducted by the Contractors State License Board's Statewide Investigative Fraud Team with assistance from the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office and the Department of Consumer Affairs Division of Investigation. Of the 11 alleged offenders netted in Saturday's sting, three had a record of previous citations, according to a Contractors State License Board news release.

The suspects were found through advertisements in local pamphlets, on Craigslist and from business cards posted on bulletin boards at local business, officials said. Undercover CSLB investigators solicited bids for exterior painting, landscaping, tree removal and fence replacement.

In addition to allegations of contracting without a license, 10 of the 11 suspects in Saturday's sting also are accused of illegal advertising. State law requires that contractors include their license number in all print, broadcast and online advertisements. Those without a license can advertise as long as the ad states that they are not state-licensed contractors, and the combined total of a project's labor and materials costs is less than \$500.

Receiving notices to appear in El Dorado Superior Court regarding illegal contracting charges are Brandon Michael Blubaugh of Cameron Park, painting and decorating; Thomas

Domenic Harris of Mountain Ranch, tree service; Miguel Angel Mota Carrera of Carmichael, landscaping; Brent Byron Hylton of Cameron Park, painting and decorating; Marty Fredrick Koulax of Auburn, tree service; Macario Ramirez Cortez of Placerville, tree service; Chin Maui Padilla of Somerset, tree service; Byron Rickey Ford of Rancho Cordova, fencing; Alan Wayne Winter of Sacramento, cabinet, millwork and finish cabinetry; Richard Alejandro Larsen Jr. of Sacramento, painting and decorating; and Jonathan Alexander Tyler of Sacramento, painting and decorating.

The Contractors State License Board conducts sting operations statewide in an effort to protect consumers, help level the playing field for legitimate contractors and to curb the underground economy, according to the news release.

Before hiring anyone to work on their property, consumers are advised to:

- Ask to see a contractor's license and photo ID to verify identity.
- Check the license number on the CSLB's website at www.cslb.ca.gov or www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com to make sure the license is in good standing and that employees are covered by workers' compensation insurance.
- Don't pay more than 10 percent or \$1,000, whichever is less, as a down payment. Exceptions exist for about two dozen licensees who carry special bonds to protect consumers, and these exceptions are noted on CSLB's website.