

Sting snares illegal contractors in South Tahoe

By KCRA-TV

A California state agency conducted a sting operation in Sacramento, South Lake Tahoe and in other parts of the state and arrested 79 people on suspicion of contracting home improvement projects without licenses or violating other standards.

In Sacramento, 11 people were arrested on suspicion that they were contracting without a license. Two of those arrested were taken to jail, one on illegal substance possession and another for drug paraphernalia and having an arrest warrant. In South Lake Tahoe, 12 were arrested.

The Department of Consumer Affairs' Statewide Investigative Fraud Team conducted the stings on Wednesday and Thursday, posing as homeowners seeking bids for home improvement projects, including painting, landscaping, flooring and fencing.

The Contractors State License Board found many of the contractors through ads on Craigslist.org.

Mark Crosson, a homeowner in El Dorado Hills, knows the pitfalls that can come with hiring an unlicensed contractor.

Crosson told KCRA 3 Friday that he can no longer find his contractor, a man who failed to start a waterfall in Crosson's backyard, even after he was already partially paid. It was too late by the time Crosson realized that the work the man did on a stone walkway was shoddy.

"Between what I contracted him for, I'm out \$1,500, and it's going to cost me at least another \$2,500 to get all the work

done correctly,” Crosson said. “I mean, you know, this is small-time stuff, but when it’s not done correctly, it’s going to cost you twice as much if you’re using an unlicensed contractor.”

When authorities with the CSLB contacted the contractors, some of them were found to be requesting excessive down payments or issuing stop orders without authorization in addition to offering services without a license, the department said.

In one instance, one worker drove away in his truck once authorities identified themselves. Another worker asked authorities to not give him a notice to appear because it would violate the terms of his parole.

One man failed to show for an appointment on day 1 of the sting because he was arrested the night before at a casino.

His wife called an investigator and rescheduled for the second day of the sting. Both showed up to give a bid, but while in the back yard, they left abruptly.

One suspect gave a bid of \$3,300 for landscaping, including \$500 for each sprinkler valve.

“Unlicensed, illegal activity that puts homeowners at risk and legitimate contractors at a competitive disadvantage will not be tolerated,” the department said in a news release.

Everyone arrested was given a notice to appear in court, and may face misdemeanor charges of contracting without a license. The penalty for a conviction is up to six months in jail and a fine of up to \$5,000. The stings occurred in Sacramento, South Lake Tahoe, Artesia, Fresno, Long Beach, Oxnard and Redding.

KCRA’s Sharokina Shams contributed to this report.