Out-of-State Companies Posing as Local Locksmiths

The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity, safety, and respect

The Attorney General's Office warns Minnesotans to beware of out-of-state companies deceptively posing as local neighborhood locksmiths.

People locked out of their cars or homes have reported that when they hired these outfits, the contractor who arrived to do the work significantly jacked up the price, damaged property, or demanded hundreds of dollars more than the quote before they would begin work.

Locksmith scams use Internet ads and phone listings to appear like local mom-and-pop shops, using names of local towns, local phone numbers and addresses, or ads claiming they've been "part of the community" for "over 30 years." Instead, these outfits operate out-of-state call centers that forward your information to local "contractors."

The Attorney General's Office permanently banned a Florida locksmith company and a New York locksmith company and their owners from operating in Minnesota. These companies lured Minnesota residents to believe they were calling a neighborhood locksmith, when they were really calling a Florida or New York call center.

Locksmith scams prey on the fact that people locked out of their cars or homes are a captive audience in need of quick, nearby help. In some cases, people who unwittingly hired one of these out-of-state operators were left stranded for hours before the contractor arrived.

One woman was locked out of her car, and the company told her the cost would be $95 for a locksmith. When the locksmith arrived, the woman asked the technician to first unlock her car so she could see if the key was there. The locksmith refused, said that he was required to make a new key, and charged $260. Her key was in the car. In another case, a University of Minnesota student was locked out of her car at night in cold weather. She contacted a locksmith company and received a quote for a $10 service fee and a $35 charge. When the locksmith arrived, he told her that the price would be $140.

Some out-of-state companies have falsely claimed that they were licensed and bonded. Minnesota law does not require locksmiths to be licensed or bonded.

Some municipalities require that a locksmith be certified before doing business in a community. To be certified, a locksmith may be required to complete certain limited training programs on installation and other locksmith skills.

Before hiring a locksmith, consider the following:

- Ask for the name and location of the business. Do not use the company if the person refuses to give a name or location.

- Ask friends or family for a word-of-mouth recommendation.

- Beware of companies that answer the phone with a general phrase, like "locksmith," rather than identifying an actual business name.

- Get a detailed price estimate. For cars, a locksmith should be able to give a quote based on year, make and model of your vehicle (including the total cost for all work, additional fees, and replacement parts). For homes, tell the locksmith the type of lock you have and demand that the estimate include the cost of any security features such as saw resistant bolts, long screws, and reinforcements behind the jamb. (Beware of any company that will not provide an estimate until after the vehicle has been inspected).

- Price shop by calling multiple locksmiths.

- Confirm that the locksmith is insured to cover damage that may result from the repair.

- Ask for identification when the locksmith arrives and verify whether the name is the same as the name on the bill and/or the vehicle the locksmith uses.

- Never sign a blank work order.

- Get an itemized receipt that includes the price of the service call, labor, and mileage.

If you believe a locksmith has committed a crime—such as criminal damage to property or criminal financial fraud—report the matter to your local police department or county sheriff's office. They may have the authority to investigate and prosecute criminal locksmith scams.

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