

DeKALB POLICE SERVICES - NORTH PRECINCT

FEBRUARY 2003

NEIGHBOR NEWS

DeKALB POLICE STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Each day we will strive to make DeKalb County a safe environment that is free of crime and the fear of it, through effective and creative community policing. We will safeguard life and property, preserve the peace, and detect and prevent crime, which will overall improve the quality of life for the citizens of this great County. We will accomplish this by collaborating with the community, in order to form co-partnerships to improve community policing.

SCAMS! "right here in River City"

Metro Atlanta Police Departments have received several reports from elderly residents that have been "ripped off" by unscrupulous scam artists. The typical scam scenario usually goes something like this:

An elderly home owner is approached by two or more men posing as general "handy-men type" workers who have a *few hours slack time between jobs*. They offer to pressure wash the residents' home at a very low price, (usually less than \$50) if in return, the home owner will allow them to place a sign in the front yard for advertisement. They convince the home owner that his home is in much need of their service, and that it would prevent further aging of the home, and improve the appearance tremendously. *Their friendly manner and seemingly sincere interest in wanting to help an elderly citizen with the maintenance of his home, soon melts any reluctance of the home owner* and he finally agrees. The men unload pressure washing equipment from their pick-ups and busily spray some water around the house for about 30 minutes and then pronounce the job completed. Although the home owner can see very little difference, the men assure the home owner that the house will look completely new after it has dried out. The men request to be paid by

personal check and in some cases have volunteered to assist the home owner in making out the check. But in every incident **they have later altered the check by increasing the payment amount anywhere from four to nine thousand dollars**. The check is then cashed right away at a branch bank and the home owner doesn't find out about it until sometime later when he receives his statement or when one of his checks bounces. And needless to say, the sign they leave behind is bogus also.

If you are approached by anyone whom you did not call, offering to make any kind of home repairs, please tell them you will have to think about it for a few days, and then report it to the Police. If they are legitimate, they won't mind answering a few questions from the Police.

And never allow anyone you don't know and trust to fill out a check for you!

TIP-OFFS to "RIP-OFFS"

Here are some **"red flags"** you should be aware of that will help protect yourself and your loved ones from **home repair scams**.

1. Door-to-door solicitations to do painting, roofing or paving repairs.
2. An offer to apply "sealers" to roofs, walls, concrete or asphalt.
3. "Left-over" materials at a 'cheap' price.
4. High pressure or scare tactics.
5. The use of mixed names such as, Robert Johnson Stewart and Robert Stewart Johnson.

6. **Reluctance to give a written, up-front price or contract in advance of work being performed.**
7. **An insistence of payment in cash or check - no charge cards.**
8. **Brand-new vehicles, truck-mounted spray machines, and out-of-state license plates.**
9. **Toll-free telephone numbers instead of local numbers.**
10. **Post office boxes, private mailboxes and suites instead of local business addresses.**

A Final Thought: These lawbreakers perform inferior, useless or even destructive work. And once the victim realizes that they have been bilked, it is usually too late to locate the fraudulent contractor. Your best bet is to avoid these shady characters in the first place by making sure you are doing business with an established, legitimate home improvement business.

TELEPHONE SCAM

An elderly Metro Atlanta lady got a call from someone who introduced himself as a representative of the **National Grants Information Center**, located in New York and gave her a 1-800 number where she could call and verify the authenticity of the company. He said his organization had been contracted by the U.S. Government to contact senior citizens and inform them of a new program to assist those on fixed incomes with their expenses. He told her that the government had now raised the benefits for Seniors, and for \$29 he would send her the appropriate paperwork and information for her to start receiving these new benefits, such as assistance in buying her eyeglasses, prescription drugs, etc.

Believing the caller's story, the lady freely gave him her date of birth, her bank routing number, account number, and a check number. He told her to go ahead and make the check out to the National Grants Center and date it for March 3rd or 4th, because that is when the money would come out of her account. Later, he told her he just remembered a new change in the company's instructions and that he no longer needed the check in advance, so she should just void the check. He ended the conversation by assuring her that her

name was now on the mailing list to receive all the necessary paperwork and forms, so that she could start receiving government benefits assistance.

Several weeks later, the lady discovered her bank account had been drained of thousands of dollars by counterfeit checks. Questions from the bank investigators soon revealed the phone conversation with the National Grants Information Center representative and how she had been tricked into giving out her banking information to him.

Needless to say, the bank investigators could not find any such company. They even searched the internet directory, and went to the NY State Web site to look for a license for this business, with no positive matches. When the 1-800 number was called, a legitimate business in West Virginia answered, and said that they have gotten hundreds of calls from people wanting to check on their benefits, etc.

Moral of the story: Everyone that calls you on the phone is not a "good Samaritan" wanting to do you a favor. **Do not** give out any personal information to anyone over the phone. If you receive a call asking you for personal information, tell them you must first check with your attorney before you can release that information. Try to get as much information from them about their organization as possible, and then report the call to your bank officials, but **do not give out any personal information to the caller.**

Latest Robbery Gimmick

Recently there have been several robbery incidents around Atlanta, where an unsuspecting female, driving alone in her vehicle has been bumped from the rear by another vehicle. When the female got out of her car to examine the damage, she was robbed and in some incidents, beaten up.

If your vehicle is ever bumped from the rear, look around at your surroundings. Unless the area is well lighted and there are several other people around to observe what is happening, DO NOT GET OUT OF YOU CAR! Motion for the driver of the other vehicle to follow you and proceed to a place where it is well lighted and there are others around to witness anything that might happen. If he doesn't follow you, then it is a pretty good bet that you wouldn't get any insurance info from him anyway, so don't take the risk! Better safe than sorry!