



## MONTEREY POLICE DEPARTMENT

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The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) Statewide Investigative Fraud Team (SWIFT), with the assistance of the Monterey Police Department, conducted a sting operation in Monterey this week. Subjects were invited to locations in Monterey to bid on various jobs ranging from landscaping and masonry to concrete and painting. The purpose of this operation, which is held statewide on an almost weekly basis, is to highlight the dangers to consumers who hire unlicensed workers, and to educate unlicensed workers about California laws.

The two-day sting resulted in 28 unlicensed operators being ordered to appear in Monterey County Superior Court on misdemeanor charges for contracting without a license, for advertising violations, and for demanding excessive down payments. The charges carry a maximum of six months in jail or a \$1,000 fine for the first offense. A second violation carries a mandatory 90-day jail sentence.

By law, all contractors who perform work that totals \$500 or more (labor and materials) must be licensed by the CSLB. In addition, anyone licensed by the CSLB after January 1, 2005 undergoes a complete background check by the Department of Justice before being given a license. Also, because many unlicensed operators don't comply with the worker's compensation laws, they often submit lower bids on jobs. If one of their workers is injured on the job, the

homeowner could be liable. If a deal goes bad with an unlicensed contractor, the homeowner has very few options.

The CSLB urges consumers to follow these tips when dealing with a building contractor:

- Hire only licensed contractors and ask to see the license.
- Don't rush into decisions and don't hire the first contractor who comes along.
- Be especially hesitant when approached by someone offering home improvement services door-to-door, especially when they will use material they claim is left over from another job.
- Verify the contractor's license by checking online at [www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov) or via CSLB's automated phone service at 1-800-321-CSLB (2752).
- Don't pay more than 10% down or \$1,000, whichever is less.
- Don't pay cash, and don't let the payments get ahead of the work.
- Get three bids, check references, and get a written contract.
- Contact the CSLB if you have a complaint against a contractor.

The CSLB operates under the umbrella of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. The CSLB licenses and regulates California's 292,000 contractors, and investigates more than 20,000 complaints against contractors annually.

Questions and inquiries can be directed to the CSLB Public Information Officer, Rick Lopes at 916-255-4161.

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