

WASHINGTON STATE



NEWS

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Suspectfraud.com Helps Consumers

“Check with the State before It’s Too Late”

OLYMPIA, Feb. 26, 2009 -- The economic slowdown may be pinching pocketbooks, but that hasn’t stopped fly-by-night roofers, unlicensed movers and fake mortgage brokers from continuing to gouge unsuspecting customers while undercutting legitimate businesses.

In an effort to counter consumer fraud, Governor Chris Gregoire has proclaimed March 1-7 Washington State Consumer Protection Week, and has asked state agencies to help consumers avoid the pitfalls of dealing with an underground economy that too frequently takes the money and runs.

To assist consumers in checking out businesses before they commit their hard-earned dollars, the Department of Revenue, in cooperation with the Department of Labor & Industries, Employment Security, Attorney General’s Office, Secretary of State, Department of Financial Institutions, Utilities and Transportation Commission, Department of Licensing, and Office of the Insurance Commissioner, has set up a central web site, www.suspectfraud.com, to provide links to consumer fraud services.

“Knowledge is the best defense, and state agencies are combining forces to make it easier than ever for the public to ‘check with the state before it’s too late,’” Gregoire said. “We don’t want your pain to be their gain.”

Links on www.suspectfraud.com allow consumers to check whether businesses are registered and licensed with the state and to report them if they are not. Consumers also can check to see if a registered business owes the state taxes, has had complaints filed against it, or is the subject of state enforcement actions.

Visitors also can verify the legitimacy of charity fundraisers, and report fraud involving a variety of industries, such as banks, child support, insurance, unemployment and workers' compensation, vehicle titles, and medical services. Links also are provided to assistance for fraud victims.

Under-the-table operators cost the state revenues during tight budget times. The state estimates that it loses \$457 million a year in taxes to the underground economy, with \$183 million of that attributable to contractors. All too frequently, these businesses charge customers sales tax but don't remit it to the state, a felony under state law. More information on the scope of unregistered businesses is available at http://dor.wa.gov/docs/reports/Joint_Unregistered_Business_Study_2007.pdf.

Governor Gregoire proclaimed the first week of March as Washington State Consumer Protection Week as part of National Consumer Protection Week. More information on the national program is available at <http://www.consumer.gov/ncpw/>.

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