



AG COOPER LOCKS OUT PHONY LOCKSMITHS

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Sham locksmiths barred from advertising or performing services in North Carolina

Raleigh: Attorney General Roy Cooper today won a court order to stop a network of phony locksmiths from ripping off North Carolina consumers.

"It's frustrating to find yourself locked out of your home or car, and it's even worse when someone you call for help tries to rip you off," Cooper said. "Taking advantage of vulnerable customers is no way to do business, and we're stepping in to stop it."

Wake County Superior Court Judge Paul C. Ridgeway Thursday agreed with Cooper's request for a temporary restraining order to bar several locksmith companies and their owners from advertising, offering or performing any locksmith services in North Carolina. Cooper is seeking a permanent ban on the companies, refunds for consumers, and civil penalties of \$5,000 for each illegal act by the companies.

Named as defendants in the lawsuit filed today are: 704 Locksmith, Inc. of Charlotte which does business in the Triangle area under several names including Raleigh Locksmith, Durham Locksmith, Apex Locksmith and Smithfield Locksmith; NC Charlotte Locksmith which does business throughout central and western North Carolina using a variety of names such as Charlotte Locksmith, Concord Locksmith, Hickory Locksmith, and Shelby Locksmith; Anna Konevsky of Charlotte, president of 704 Locksmith and NC Charlotte Locksmith; Locksmith Services, Inc. of Charlotte, which also operates as Cary Locksmith and Atlantis Locksmith; and Tamir Avraham of Charlotte, president of Locksmith Services, Inc.

According to the Attorney General's investigation, the defendants advertise online and in the yellow pages using names, telephone numbers and addresses that make their companies appear to be local. In many cases, they use names and addresses that belong to legitimate locksmith businesses. No one who works for the defendants is actually a licensed locksmith as required by law, but the companies advertise and perform locksmith services.

North Carolina consumers have called these companies looking for a local locksmith who could come let them into their home, business or car. As alleged in complaint filed by Cooper's office, consumers are routinely quoted one price on the phone and then charged a much higher price by the locksmith who shows up to do the work. Consumers are typically told that their lock must be drilled even when that isn't necessary, which will cost them \$100 more and destroy the lock. People are then charged another \$100 or more to replace their destroyed locks. The defendants usually demand payment in cash, refusing to let consumers pay by credit card.

As cited in the complaint, one Cary consumers' experience illustrates the way the defendants operate. After

getting locked out of her home, the consumer used a neighbor's computer to locate a locksmith, Cary Locksmith, which was actually Locksmith Services. She called the phone number listed and an agent from the company showed up an hour later. He told her that it wouldn't cost much to get back in her home. After he drilled through the lock to open her door, he told her she owed \$215 plus another \$100 if she wanted the lock replaced. She wanted to pay by credit card but the agent insisted on cash, even offering to drive her to the ATM. She refused and eventually paid by check—which the agent at first wanted her to make out to him rather than to the company.

To avoid falling victim to similar scams, Cooper recommends the following tips:

- Whenever possible, check out a business before you do business with them by calling the Attorney General's Office and the Better Business Bureau.
- People who practice skilled trades such as locksmiths are required to be licensed. Before someone does work for you, ask if they're licensed and write down their license number.
- Get a price quote in writing before you agree to any work.
- For services you may need in an emergency, such as a locksmith or plumber, find a good one before an emergency happens. Ask family and friends for recommendations, check them out and then save their contact information so you'll have it when you need it.

"Shutting down scammers protects consumers and legitimate businesses," Cooper said. "Let my office know if you spot a potential scam."

Consumers can call the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 1-877-5-NO-SCAM to check out a company or file a complaint.

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