



A local locksmith scheme with international ties

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A locksmith company that appears to be from Metro Vancouver could actually have links to an international operation that American authorities say makes overcharging customers part of its business model.

According to the Greater Vancouver Better Business Bureau, a local company known as 123 24 Hour Emergency Locksmith uses the same phone numbers as Florida-based Dependable Locks Inc., whose employees faced fraud charges last year.

"You're phoning a number you think is local, they're redirecting it to the States," said the BBB's Lynda Pasacreta. "Someone is coming over, they do shoddy work, and then you can't find out where they are or who they are."

- **Related:** Is your locksmith licenced? Find out [here](#).

The apparently local company has run into trouble in this province as well: last year B.C. authorities cited locksmith Avraham Cohen for operating without a licence, saying he did business as both 123 24 Hour Emergency Locksmith and Dependable Locks.

The company has been pulled from B.C.'s corporate registry, and Cohen was ordered out of the country by immigration authorities.

But in the United States, Dependable Lock has faced an even harsher crackdown: police in Clearwater, Florida arrested two locksmiths on fraud charges.

In an affidavit filed in an American court, U.S. postal inspector John Jackman claims that the Florida office is the headquarters for a national network of at least 100 locksmiths in major population centres. It has a full time staff of telephone dispatchers in Clearwater, Florida, with 20 to 30 on duty at any one time.

"The dispatchers receive phone calls electronically forwarded from hundreds to thousands of telephone numbers listed nationwide for emergency locksmith services," Jackman says in the affidavit.

In interviews with former employees, the inspector says he learned that the dispatchers were told to understate the price of the lockout, while locksmiths were instructed to charge significantly more.

The profits are then split between the locksmith and the dispatcher, the affidavit said. The proceeds are usually sent by money order, the court documents say, adding that many of the money orders were made payable to El-Ad Group, which the affidavit says is a real estate business from Israel.

"The co-operating witnesses stated that Dependable Locks technicians are trained and instructed by Dependable Locks managers to use coercive and intimidating techniques to ensure consumer payment," the affidavit says.

When CTV News tried the numbers identified as Dependable Locks in May, they worked -- and someone picked up the phone.

However the person on the line refused to identify himself or confirm anything about the company. That person claimed 123 24 Hour Emergency Locksmith was legitimate, and denied any connection to Dependable Locks Inc.

When a customer ordered service from that number, the locksmith who came told the customer that he had to destroy her lock to get into her house -- even though a veteran locksmith told CTV News the lock could have been easily and cheaply picked.

The controversy around 123 24 Hour Emergency Locksmith has licensed locksmiths like Ted Dubnyk concerned.

Dubnyk runs a family-owned, local company called Dependable Lock and Key, which has a similar name to Dependable Locks, and he has been fielding complaints from customers who confuse the two.

"It's upsetting," he told CTV News. "It's bad for the business, and it's bad for locksmiths."

Dubnyk says he knows that authorities are trying to put a stop to any overcharging, but he's frustrated that authorities haven't been able to do more to protect customers.

"It's a real concern to me and a lot of people," he said.

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