

Attorney General makes arrests in locksmith scam

By [St. Joseph News-Press](#)

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Photo by Todd Weddle

A scam that had local locksmiths concerned has led to several arrests.

Federal criminal charges were filed against three people and state criminal charges against a Kansas City man related to the scam.

According to Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster, his office investigated Dependable Locks of Tampa, Florida, for fraudulently advertising by using at least 16 different names that all led consumers to one company and for charging customers 2 to 3 times more than the price quoted them to unlock their cars.

A joint state and federal investigation led to allegations that a national network of at least 100 locksmith technicians, operating from major population centers across the United States, were instructed to charge up to \$179 for unlocking customers' cars, after the customers were quoted the price of \$54 by the company's telephone dispatchers. The federal affidavit also said that many of the locksmith technicians working for Dependable Locks are aliens who entered the United States either illegally or are on visas that do not permit them to work as locksmith technicians.

Dependable Locks, a Florida-based company, was doing business all over the country, even in Northwest Missouri.

According to the Better Business Bureau and the Missouri attorney general's office, Dependable Locks was duping its customers. Both agencies reported receiving hundreds of complaints against the self-proclaimed locksmith.

Mr. Koster sued Dependable Locks in April, claiming it defrauded customers, and asked that it make restitution. A trial date is set for Jan. 10, 2011.

"This locksmith company clearly deceived Missourians, tricking them into using their business and then overcharging them," Mr. Koster said.

The investigation began a couple of years ago after several complaints were filed in the Kansas City area. Dependable Locks had 17 other names it was using to do business in the area.

In October, a local locksmith warned local consumers to be wary of the scam. "They're not locksmiths," said David Haun, owner of St. Joe Locksmiths. "They're giving all locksmiths a bad name.

On its Web site, the Associated Locksmiths of America state that these companies purposely manipulated phone book and Internet listings with multiple false addresses and phone numbers to make it seem like a neighborhood business. In actuality, consumers were calling out-of-state operations that are not locksmith companies, it said.

The attorney general's office said addresses listed for the different businesses' names were bogus - leading to vacant lots and even homes of individuals not associated with the company. The company also was not listed with the Missouri secretary of state.