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## **Carmel on the Case: Lousy Locksmiths**

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At one time or another most of us have been locked out of our homes or cars. But Seven News has learned if you rely on local phone listings to find a local locksmith, you could be in for a big surprise. Investigative reporter Carmel Cafiero is on the case.

WSVN -- Who thinks twice about unlocking a door? Except of course, when you *don't* have the key.

Judy Lissy: "We said, 'Oh, my God, welcome to Florida.'"

Judy and Alan Lissy think they were taken after they were locked out of their condo on the day they moved in.

What should have been a simple job to pick the lock turned into a \$799 bill.

Alan Lissy: "He said that he... "

Judy Lissy: "He had to take the lock out."

Alan Lissy: "He had to drill it out instead of picking it."

Carmel Cafiero: "How often does that happen that somebody can't pick the lock so you have to drill?"

Fred Burton: "Very, very seldom."

Locksmiths Fred Burton and Bob McMahon say all but the most sophisticated locks can be picked with specialized tools.

They say drills are often used by unskilled people who ruin locks and run up big bills.

And lately, they say, there are a lot of those untrained locksmiths working in South Florida.

They're being dispatched by out-of-town companies that use fake names and addresses with local telephone numbers.

Carmel Cafiero: "Phone listings for local locksmiths are being flooded with companies listing bogus locations. For example, I'm standing at an intersection in downtown Fort Lauderdale where five different companies claim to be located. And not one of them is really here."

This construction site is supposed to be a locksmith's office.

And so is this laundromat.

Carmel Cafiero: "Erica -- I think I just talked to you."

And when I called different companies, I kept getting the same operator.

Carmel Cafiero: "How many names do you have in the phone book?"

She told me that depends on what book.

As a result of multiple listings for the same operation under different names, local locksmiths say they are losing business at an alarming rate.

Bob McMahon: "I used to be able to get like four or five lockout calls a day. It's like maybe a lockout a day. People are calling these guys and not getting the service that they deserve."

And it's not just about service.

When you call a locksmith, you're giving them access to your home or car.

Fred Burton: "You don't know if they are going to make a key and sell the key to somebody. You come home from work one day and everything is gone."

But this is not just a South Florida problem.

The Associated Locksmiths of America says problems with phony companies are being reported from New York to California and points in between.

John Casey: "I believe that people are getting taken advantage of."

Our sister station in Boston also looked into these phony locksmiths.

It also found fake local address being used and workers being dispatched by out-of-state companies.

And despite the fact locks could easily be picked and opened, workers there wanted to drill and charge big bucks.

Fred Burton: "The only thing I can think to tell people to do is if you call a locksmith, and they ask for your zip code, just tell them, 'Thank you very much, I will look for somebody else.'"

There's never a good time to get locked out but, if you do, take the time to question the company you contact.

It could make the difference between a big inconvenience and a big bill.

**IF THERE'S SOMETHING YOU THINK CARMEL SHOULD INVESTIGATE, GIVE HER A CALL:**

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