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Call 4 Action: Out-Of-State Locksmiths Picking Local Customers' Pockets

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The Better Business Bureau said shady, out-of-state locksmith companies are posing as local businesses hoping to rip you off when you're in a pinch.

The frightening thing about some of the so-called swindlers is that it can be very difficult for you to distinguish between them and a local, reputable company.

Their advertisements have local phone numbers and addresses, but Call 4 Action discovered that doesn't necessarily mean anything.

Searching based on what you find in the phone book could send you walking into a trap.

"The worst thing is that they're taking advantage of someone who needs immediate assistance," said Warren King of the BBB.

King said some out-of-state locksmith companies are using ads in the Yellow Pages with local phone numbers to make you think they're local businesses.

"And those numbers are directed to a call center and in most instances, that call center more than likely will not answer with a legitimate company name," King said. "They may just answer, 'locksmith.'"

The company sends someone in the area to your home.

But the BBB said the locksmith significantly overcharges you, often for unnecessary services, and the final bill can be four times the estimate quoted over the phone.

The practice that infuriates local locksmiths, including Robert Owens, who said he couldn't believe what the bad companies are getting away with.

"The job not being done right in some cases, but not being able, if there is a follow-up service call, they can't even find the person again," said Owens.

Among the companies named in the warning is Locksmith 24-Hour Inc., for which Call 4 Action found a local listing in Bridgeville.

When Call 4 Action called, the operator acknowledged they were based in New York.

But company's address is listed at 3985 William Penn Highway in Monroeville.

At that location, Call 4 Action found a bar and restaurant called the Penn Monroe Grille.

The next time you call a locksmith, first, ask the company for its physical address. Then ask if they're bonded or if they're members of an association, and get proof when they arrive.

Finally, if they do not come in a marked vehicle, ask to see company identification.

For more information, visit www.WesternPennsylvania.BBB.org.

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