

# Sting key to picking apart locksmith scheme

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A nationwide operation in which people pose as locksmiths has infiltrated the Triangle, preying on people who lock themselves out of their homes.

According to reports, the group saturates a market with ads touting low service fees, and when people call for assistance, out-of-state call centers dispatch crews in unmarked vehicles to their homes. Once the crews arrive, however, the price to get inside the house quickly escalates.

The Better Business Bureau has issued national warnings about the deceptive sales tactics used by the operation. But the BBB said the operation is hard to track because it uses several business names.

An [undercover investigation by WRAL News](#) caught a pair of bogus locksmiths in the act as they drilled the front-door locks on a Cary home and tried to charge the homeowner more than \$400.



Paul Atkinson, a licensed locksmith with Marshall's Locksmith Service in Raleigh, inspected the woman's home and said it had standard residential locks on the front door. Because the deadbolt wouldn't be touched – the woman was supposed to have locked her keys inside – Atkinson said a legitimate locksmith could get inside the home for less than \$100.

"It should be pretty easy to pick," he said.

The woman called SOS Locksmiths, which has prominent Internet ads for people searching for locksmiths in Raleigh. Within 30 minutes, a white minivan with a Tennessee license plate pulled into her driveway, and two men in street clothes hopped out with a toolbox.

An SOS representative initially told the woman on the phone that getting her inside the house would cost \$35. After a quick look at the front door, however, the two men told her they would have to drill the locks. The bill had ballooned to \$180.

One man proceeds to drill the deadbolt over the woman's objections that it wasn't locked.

"If the other part wasn't locked, then you wouldn't have needed to break my lock," she said.

"It was locked," the man replied.

After the doorknob lock was drilled, the men opened the door and informed the homeowner that she has high-security locks that will cost an additional \$20 each to replace.

"It's a different amount now?" she asked, insisting on getting a calculator from her kitchen to total up the bill.

The final total for the service was \$404.98.

After a WRAL News crew confronted the men, they quickly packed up and left without answering any questions – or collecting any payment.

"Couple of slime buckets," the woman said after the men left. "It just made me angry to think someone could come in and take advantage of you like that."

SOS declined to comment on the actions of their locksmiths. When asked where the company was located, a representative said he couldn't give out that information.

Marshall's Locksmith repaired the woman's drilled-out locks in a matter of minutes, but Atkinson said such bogus outfits continue to work in the area, giving the rest of the industry a bad name.

"You feel like you're pressured into paying the higher price. That's outrageous," he said.

Reporter: [Cullen Browder](#)

Photographer: [Greg Clark](#)

Web Editor: [Matthew Burns](#)

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