

Wednesday, 23rd December 2009

ITINERANT BITUMEN LAYERS INTERCEPTED, ONE JAILED

Several itinerant bitumen layers who have been ripping off consumers across the State in recent weeks have been intercepted, with one already jailed for using fake identification to swindle consumers.

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gail Gago, says this is a great result in protecting consumers from these predatory operators.

“The Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) has been pursuing these shonks for some time now. They have been performing shoddy bitumen laying work and demanding exorbitant payments from consumers before quickly moving on,” says Minister Gago.

“Now, thanks to the hard work of OCBA investigators, SAPOL and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, an arrest has been made with one man sentenced to prison for nine months.”

OCBA investigators responded to sightings and tip-offs from the public and SA Police, pursuing the men for over a week as they drove around the State soliciting work laying bitumen driveways. When OCBA suspected the men were from another country they alerted the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

OCBA and Immigration officials caught up with one of the men as he was about to lay a driveway at Oakbank. The itinerant was detained on suspicion of breaching his visa conditions until Police arrived. He was subsequently arrested on charges of deception, and he has pleaded guilty in the Mt Barker Magistrates Court to unlawful possession of fake identification documents and dishonest dealings with documents.

Further investigations by SAPOL and DIAC uncovered another approximately twenty overseas visitors staying at Mawson Lakes, also targeting residents with the drive-way laying scheme. The men were questioned and SAPOL investigations are continuing.

DIAC is also seeking to investigate the men further to determine their eligibility to remain in Australia, but the agency suspects that some of the men have already fled the country.

It is likely that the itinerants operated in breach of door-to-door sales provisions set out in the *Fair Trading Act 1987*. Under the provisions, consumers are entitled to a 10-day cooling off period during which the trader cannot provide any goods or services or accept any payment. Consumers are entitled to a refund and nullification of any agreement should a trader breach this legislation.

Minister Gago reminded consumers not to deal with itinerant tradespeople.

“The people who go from house to house selling their bitumen laying or painting services usually aren’t licensed; they perform substandard work for an inflated price, and then quickly move on,” says Minister Gago.

“Consumers are left to fork out even more money to have the work repaired by a qualified tradesperson.”

Traders who breach door-to-door selling laws face penalties of up to \$10,000. Undertaking unlicensed building work carries penalties up to \$20,000.

To report itinerant traders or for more information, consumers can call OCBA on 8204 9777 or 131 882 for regional callers, or visit the website at www.ocba.sa.gov.au