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Transient Contractors: Get the Facts Before You Buy

PIERRE, S.D. – High winds and golf-ball sized hail recently hit Yankton and surrounding areas. As a result, transient contractors and vendors have hit the area as well.

While many of the contractors and vendors are legitimate, the South Dakota Department of Revenue and Regulation says there are common-sense steps the public can take to ensure vendors are reputable before deciding whether to do business with them.

If you're considering hiring a person for repairs or construction services, the department advises you to:

- Ask for a written price quote, in advance.
- Question contractors to see if they have permanent addresses and telephone numbers, and don't assume if the information they provide is local that they're local businesses. Often, transient vendors will have business cards printed with local mailing services or motel addresses and telephone numbers.
- Ask for a list of local references and check them before making a decision.
- Ask if the contractor has workman's compensation and general liability insurance. If they're not properly insured, homeowners may be liable for accidents that occur on their property.
- Be careful about paying for work in advance; before making final payments make sure transient vendors have paid their local suppliers. You as the customer may be held liable for unpaid materials bills.
- Make sure you're completely satisfied with the work before paying the bill, and don't pay more for the job than originally quoted unless you've given written approval for the additional work or costs.

Asking the right questions when approached by vendors can help you avoid making a purchase you may regret:

- Question the salesperson about the product, warranties, guarantees, etc.
- Get something in writing with the company's name, address and phone number.
- Ask to see their current South Dakota tax license. State law requires all persons selling products or services to have a current South Dakota sales tax license or contractor's excise tax license. To verify if a license is valid, call the Revenue and Regulation Department's toll-free helpline at 1-800-829-9188.

If you have doubts about a vendor or think you may have been the victim of a scam, call your local police department or county sheriff's office immediately. Be prepared to give as much information as you can about the vendor, including the name of the company and salesperson, company address and telephone number, and make, model and license number (if possible) of the vehicle the vendor was driving. Without tips from the public, law enforcement officials may not be able to catch illegal vendors before they move on to the next community.

For more information on transient vendors, contact the South Dakota Department of Revenue and Regulation's toll-free helpline at 1-800-829-9188.