



STATE OF FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL REGULATION



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DBPR LAUNCHES UNLICENSED ACTIVITY COMPLAINT LINE

Orlando – The Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) today launched a toll-free number for unlicensed activity complaints. The toll-free line has been established to provide a higher level of customer service and increased consumer accessibility to report unlicensed activity. The toll-free unlicensed activity line is 1.866.532.1440.

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"I'm very pleased to announce the creation of a toll-free line dedicated to stopping unlicensed activity. For the first time, consumers will have access to a toll-free line where they may report the unlicensed practice of any profession DBPR regulates," said Secretary Marsteller. "My top priority for the department is to improve our customer service, and the toll-free line will give consumers an increased protection against unlicensed individuals."

DBPR continually encourages consumers to make smart choices and avoid being victimized by an unlicensed individual. Individuals may be unlicensed because they are not be able to meet the financial requirements; not be able to pass a background check; or do not meet the education, experience or skill requirements.

"Due to the severe nature of the past two hurricane seasons, there is a heightened focus on unlicensed contracting. However, it is important for consumers to realize that unlicensed activity affects us all in a variety of settings," Deputy Secretary Yecke said. "A license is required for many professionals, including veterinarians, real estate professionals, cosmetologists, electrical contractors, barbers and auctioneers."

The Division of Real Estate's priority is to increase public awareness of the dangers of conducting real estate transactions with unlicensed individuals. It is a third degree felony in the state of Florida to act as a real estate broker or sales associate without a license. In order to increase awareness and to encourage buyers, sellers, and real estate agents to check the status of an individual's license before conducting business, the Department has begun an advertising campaign focus on prevention. This month, a series of ads began running in selected real estate magazines throughout the state. The attached ad will run for a period of 12 months.

"It is critical that citizens report suspected unlicensed activity," said Mark Reddinger, Unlicensed Activity Program Administrator. "By doing so, we can assist in the prevention of scams and victimization, and protect Florida's citizens from financial and material harm."

DBPR continues to aggressively respond to the effects of last year's hurricane season on our citizens and licensees. The department is dedicated to looking for creative ways to expand and increase outreach and enforcement efforts. Recent examples include the creation of a Law Enforcement Quick Reference Guide for spotting and taking action against unlicensed contractors that will soon be available to all local law enforcement

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agencies, and the development of an informational insert to be provided to local utility companies for inclusion in bills. The department has also recently completed the translation of the “Protect Your Investment – Hire only licensed contractors” brochure into Spanish. In addition, DBPR officials have met with local entities in various counties statewide to discuss joining forces in a renewed cooperative effort to combat unlicensed contracting.

Homeowner Annette Clark, of Palm Bay, attended today’s announcement. The Clarks paid \$9,200 to have a post-hurricane carport installed by David Saegar of David K. Saegar Aluminum Sales. Saegar is a carpenter by trade, not licensed to perform this scope of work and therefore was practicing unlicensed contracting. Approximately 72 hours after the job was completed, the carport collapsed. DBPR investigators visited the homeowners at their residence to assist them with the complaint filing process, obtain sworn statements and gather additional evidence. Investigators have located Saegar and obtained a commitment from him to return \$4,200 of the \$9,200 to the Clarks on or before January 6, 2006, and to return the balance within 30 days after that.

Prior to Ms. Clark contracting with the unlicensed individual, she had also contracted to have Oliver Smith, who is licensed, build her carport. She gave Oliver Smith \$4,000 for work that was never performed. DBPR investigators promptly mediated the complaint with Smith and hand-delivered a check for a full refund to the homeowners at the end of November.

DBPR Secretary, Simone Marsteller, was joined by DBPR Deputy Secretary Dennis Yecke, DBPR Unlicensed Activity Program Administrator Mark Reddinger, Division of Real Estate Director Michael Murphy, Orange County Building Safety Division Manager Robert Olin, Orange County Director of Public Safety, Jerry Demings, and Rosalee Hopard with the Orange County Consumer Fraud Unit, as well as several members of the professional boards.

The mission of the Unlicensed Activity Program is to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public by identifying and eliminating unlicensed activity through coordinated efforts with local building departments, law enforcement agencies, local state attorneys’ offices and other state agencies. Consumers are urged to verify that professionals’ licenses are current and active by calling 850.487.1395, or visiting www.MyFloridaLicense.com.

The agency’s mission is to ensure that professions and businesses provide quality services for the health, safety and welfare of citizens and visitors in the state of Florida. DBPR licenses nearly 1 million businesses and professionals ranging from real estate agents, veterinarians, and accountants to contractors and cosmetologists. For more information, please visit www.MyFlorida.com/dbpr.

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