

Home Improvement Contractor Arrested for Defrauding Delaware Homeowners

Department of Justice Consumer Protection Unit asks other potential victims to come forward

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Unit announced that a New Castle County-based contractor faces criminal charges for defrauding multiple Delaware homeowners.

Mario Mareno, 49, doing business as Tradesmen Services, was arrested on Friday, May 13 by the First State Fugitive Task Force on four outstanding warrants for Home Improvement Fraud from the Delaware State Police, the New Castle County Police, and the Middletown Police Department. The Consumer Protection Unit is aware of other homeowners who have contacted authorities regarding Mareno and believes that there are more victims who have not yet come forward.

Law enforcement believes Mareno typically solicits and corresponds with victims via Facebook, text messaging, or email, and gets the victims to make large up-front payments, allegedly to obtain required permits and purchase materials, and then never substantially completes the work. In some cases, victims say they have discovered that Mareno did not obtain permits or purchase materials as represented. Mareno allegedly gives victims excuses for why the work is not done, and repeatedly promises to refund up-front payments but never actually does so.

"Home improvement scams are one of the most common types of complaints made by consumers to our Consumer Fraud Hotline,"

said Attorney General Matt Denn. "All Delawareans hiring a contractor for home improvement work need to be alert for scams, and help avoid them by doing homework before hiring a contractor. Contractors should always be bonded and maintain all required licenses for mechanical work. It's also important for homeowners to follow up on references, talk to friends and neighbors about a contractor's reputation, and never pay for the work in cash or up front."

Additional alleged victims have been identified by the Consumer Protection Unit, and the office urges other consumers, who believe they may have been victimized by Mareno or Tradesmen Services, or have information to share with authorities, to contact Consumer Protection Unit Special Investigators Jose Ortiz (302-577-8421) or Alan Rachko (302-577-8309).

If consumers suspect they are a victim of home improvement fraud, they should contact the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Hotline at 1-800-220-5424.

In all cases, defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.