

'Door-to-door distraction scam' reported, Sheriff's Office offers tips for this situation

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
November 19 2018 11:30 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Lt. Kris Tharp and the Madison County Sheriff's Office released information Monday morning that a scam/theft commonly referred to as a "Distraction Scam" is occurring in Madison County, Illinois, and surrounding communities.

Lt. Tharp said over the course of the last few weeks elderly residents on at least three separate occasions have been victimized by perpetrators who arrived unannounced and unsolicited at their homes. They have knocked on the door and posed as individuals there to do "warranty work" on home gutters and brick (masonry). In addition, they posed as persons there to do "snow removal."

"Each time, through high pressure tactics, the suspects have been allowed entry into their victim's home. Once inside the residence one suspect will distract the home owner while the other discretely rummages the home stealing valuables, i.e., money, and jewelry," Lt. Tharp said.

"The suspects in this case, have been described as Hispanic males, driving a dark gray /silver Mazda SUV, 4 door, bearing a temporary registration permit in the rear window (photo attached).

"Investigators believe the men have likely victimized many more people than those who have reported the activity. To date, the suspects are known to have been in St. Clair County, Illinois, and in Madison County, along the Illinois Route 140 corridor (Hamel, Illinois and Rosewood Heights, Illinois)."

Lt. Tharp said: "Do not focus on why these men are knocking on the doors. The scam will always involve an unsolicited service, high pressure tactics, and a request to come into the residence. Please talk to your family, loved-ones, friends, and neighbors about this matter. Remember, above all else, never let strangers into your home who have arrived unsolicited under such circumstances. Individuals encountering such activity are encouraged to contact the police immediately.

"Should you have information about these crimes please contact the Madison County Sheriff's Office or your local police agency. Please consider visiting the Madison County TRIAD Facebook page and website for more information about scams and ways you can stay safe in your home."

For more information or if you have any information to provide contact:

Madison County Sheriff's Office

Main Dispatch: (618) 692-4433

Investigation: (618) 692-0871

Anonymous Tip-Line: (618) 296-3000

Facebook: Madison County Triad @MCSOTRIADIL

Website: www.co.madison.il.us/triad

Agency Contact: Lt. Kristopher Tharp
618-296-4818

DISTRACTION SCAM

HOW THE SCAM WORKS

These criminals generally work as a two or three-person team. In an effort to trick the homeowner and give them a false sense of reassurance, they often pretend to have met or done work for them previously. They may also claim to have known a close family member, or to have once lived in the neighborhood.

After gaining entry to a potential victim's home, one scammer typically engages the victim in conversation. Another member of the con team brings flooring samples into the home. Eventually, one of the group slips away to steal credit cards, cash, and jewelry.

Based on reports, the crooks will strike every few months, hitting one of two victims before moving on to another area or neighborhood.

NUMEROUS VERSIONS OF THIS CON HAVE BEEN REPORTED

In another version of this scam, the con team consists of two women, one of them supposedly pregnant and in some kind of distress. They appear at a potential victim's door, asking if the pregnant woman can use the bathroom. While one crook engages the victim in conversation or makes a telephone call, the other (who may not actually be pregnant at all) collects valuables while pretending to use the bathroom.

Distraction scammers have also been known to masquerade as utility company employees taking indoor measurements for home energy saving projects, and other legitimate business representatives.

ALWAYS USE CAUTION WHEN A STRANGER COMES KNOCKING

All consumers — and especially the elderly — should always be extremely careful of who they let into their home. Remember, distraction scammers are slick, friendly, and good at their game. If you don't know or aren't expecting the person at the door —do not let them in under any circumstance!