

[National Consumer Protection Week](#) is March 4-10, 2018. Please visit the Office of Consumer Protection this week on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) as we bring you more tips and warnings about common scams.

The Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) would like to first warn consumers about “[Woodchuck Scams](#)” that will hit our area hard *this week*. It is rare when we can predict an absolute certainty that consumers will be scammed.

The exceptionally high winds late last week, and the number of downed tree limbs, will bring out what local law enforcement refer to as “Woodchucks.” You will have companies coming door-to-door, promising to trim trees, pick up debris, etc. While working on your trees, they will undoubtedly find wind damage to your roof, your siding, and gutters. They may talk you into discussing home improvement projects *inside* your home. As Lt. Michael Hartnett (Montgomery County Police) warned through [WTOP News](#), “They have no regard whatsoever for the trees. All they’re doing is trying to make money off of you.”

These landscapers are typically unlicensed home improvement contractors who provide false names and false/temporary contact information on the work orders. They will take the deposit, and **if** they return at all, they will do an incomplete or shoddy job on the project. The OCP has joined forces with local law enforcement from Maryland, Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia to stop these “Woodchucks.” The OCP, with the tireless assistance of law enforcement and the State’s Attorneys Office, regularly prosecute these unlicensed contractors who steal deposits or do criminally shoddy work.

TIPS TO FOLLOW

- Before you sign any contract, make sure you have done your homework. The OCP has a guide to [Choosing a Home Improvement Contractor](#).
- Please make sure that your contract has the *correct* license
 - If your tree is 20 feet or taller, an arborist license [Maryland Department of Natural Resources](#) will be needed.
 - If you are having electrical, plumbing, HVACR, or gas fitting work, a license from the Maryland Home Improvement Commission is not enough. They will need an Occupational license from the [Department of Labor](#),

[Licensing and Regulation](#). You can check a contractor's [licensing status online](#).

- [Check online](#) to make sure the license number they give you actually belongs to them. The OCP regularly handles complaints where contractors use *someone else's* MHIC or Occupational license.
- The [Door-to-Door Sales Act](#) was recently amended for home improvement contracts signed in your home. Now, instead of three (3) days, you have five (5) days to cancel the contract; seven (7) days if you are a senior.