



Prince William County Police

Community Crime Prevention Tip

4/27/15

6 Ways to Avoid a Lawn Care Service Scam

It is that time of the year again, when the temperatures rise and the smell of freshly-cut grass fills the air. If you are thinking about hiring a lawn care company to do the work for you, here are a few tips from the Better Business Bureau serving Metro Washington DC and Eastern PA.

In 2014, the BBB received hundreds of complaints against lawn care services. Many of the complaints were about shoddy workmanship, damage to lawns, failure to honor warranties, and billing and collection issues. Another common complaint was related to aggressive sales practices where the customer thought they were requesting informational brochures only to find a bill for "splash and dash" services performed.

Here are some tips for keeping your lawn and your wallet green:

Know what you want. Have in mind the types of services you are seeking (fertilizing, weeding, aerating, mowing). Ask about the products used (seed, fertilizer, weed killer), and request a yard inspection and estimate before agreeing to anything. Be wary of anyone who will quote a price for elaborate lawn work without seeing your yard first.

Understand pricing. While price is certainly a major factor in any purchasing decision, find out exactly what you are getting. Do you pay by the mow or by the week? What happens when it rains? Does mowing include edging? Do they mulch or bag the clippings? Are services performed by employees or sub-contracted out?

Check first. Make sure the company meets any local licensing requirements and has liability insurance for its workers. Ask whether they use subcontractors or only employees. Always check the company's BBB Business Review at bbb.org. Ask for references and check the company's affiliation with national franchises or associations.

Scrutinize the contract. Does the contract automatically renew from season to season and year to year? Does the company offer a guarantee? If you are not happy, what are your cancellation rights? If you choose to sign a long-term contract, make sure you get information about cancellation rights in writing in case you find the services to be unsatisfactory.

Understand the warranties and guarantees. If the service is not to your liking, or the lawn doesn't look as you anticipated, understand what recourse you may have.

Shop around. Get written estimates from at least three different companies. Keep in mind that the cheapest estimate is not necessarily the best option. You may have to invest a little more for higher quality products and services.

REPORT ALL SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY TO THE POLICE

Emergency: 911 * Non-Emergency: 703-792-6500 * Crime Prevention Unit: 703-792-7270