



CITY OF CLEARWATER

POST OFFICE BOX 4748, CLEARWATER, FLORIDA 33758-4748
CLEARWATER POLICE DEPARTMENT, 645 PIERCE STREET, CLEARWATER, FLORIDA 33756
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POLICE DEPARTMENT

RELEASE # 10-075

May 7, 2010

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UNLICENSED CONTRACTORS ARRESTED IN STING

WHO: Clearwater Police Department
Criminal Investigations Division
Economic Crimes Unit
Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation

ARRESTED:

Robert J. Ritz, DOB: 7-8-54 (1 count)
Jerry Garza, DOB: 6-20-69 (1 count)
Mark Fisher, DOB: 9-28-65 (2 counts)
Samuel E. Smith, DOB: 7-6-51 (2 counts)
Eric T. Petrone, DOB: 12-20-75 (2 counts)
Leonard M. Magness, DOB: 11-29-54 (2 counts)

WHAT: General & Electrical Contracting Without a License

CHARGES:

5 Counts General Contracting Without a License
5 Counts Electrical Contracting Without a License

WHEN: May 3, 2010 – May 6, 2010

WHERE: 19321 US 19 N.
Clearwater, Fla.

SUMMARY: Clearwater Police Department Detectives from the Economic Crimes Unit took part in a sting operation targeting contractors operating without a state license. This was a joint investigation between the Clearwater Police Department and the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation. The listed subjects were advertising their services online. An undercover decoy posing as a potential business owner and client contacted the subjects for potential job bids. A vacant office space was





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used as the site to secure the bids. The subjects that responded offered their services for general and electrical contracting.

Detectives researched the individuals and determined that they did not possess the appropriate State of Florida Contractor's License. After providing bids and responding back to the site location to sign a contract and receive a deposit, the subjects were arrested. The arrested subjects were given a Notice to Appear (NTA) and charged with the appropriate offense.

By targeting unlicensed contractors, CPD is helping safeguard citizens from potentially shoddy work, additional costs to meet compliance with state and local codes, and liabilities associated with faulty work.

Some of the WARNING SIGNS commonly associated with unlicensed contractors are:

- You are asked to pull permits (Licensed individuals have no problem dealing with local building departments).
- A large down payment is requested before work begins.
- Payment is asked for in cash, or discounts are offered as incentive to begin work.
- Contract or proposal is not on company stationery.
- The proposal or contract has vague performance conditions.
- The contractor does not have proof of licensing or insurance.
- A contractor tells you that a permit or inspections are not required for the type of work proposed.
- The individual is only willing to work after hours or on weekends.
- You are asked to make checks out to individuals and not the company, or asked to make checks out to "cash."
- License numbers do not appear on written contracts or proposals.

