

Scam Alert; New Take on Old Scam

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A new take on an old scam was reported Friday to High Country Radio and GoBlueRidge.net, a local contractor targeted in an elaborate scam that would have entwined a local real estate agency, had Erin McCutcheon of Log Home Maintenance, Inc. not stopped the scam in its tracks. McCutcheon said that she received text messages from a person claiming to be hearing impaired, and therefore only wanting to communicate by text, asking for a price on painting at a home they alleged they were buying in Seven Devils. As McCutcheon and the person on the other end of the texts exchanged a number of messages back and forth, McCutcheon's suspicions raised when the 'texter' wanted the exterior of a log home painted, and a commode inside painted—pink. The clincher, though, was the financial arrangement, the 'texter' wanting to charge the work on a credit card, paying the fees for the bank service charges—with built-in overages that she would have the contractor pay back to a courier. That part has been a familiar scam over the last decade—a person being scammed sent a cashier's check or some other seemingly secured funds that turned out to have been forged or were otherwise bogus. I contacted Sheriff Len Hagaman and he suggested McCutcheon contact his investigators to see what information they might glean in the case, especially as it might involve a stolen or otherwise fraudulent credit card. Monday, she said she did contact an investigator, and they tried the number, which was answered by a general contractor near DC who explained that the scammer is somehow using his number for texting. He said when replying directly to the text, it goes to the scammer, but if you enter it manually, it goes to him, the correct owner of the phone. He said his number has been used to attempt to fraudulently hire roofers, painters, framers and others with this scam. I called the real estate agent with the home listing to about the status of the listed home, and she said that the listing was brand new, and not under negotiations. It appeared that the scammer just pulled a listing off of the Internet, telling McCutcheon that she could arrange to get keys to her to do the work, but the agent said no such arrangements had been made. Advice from law enforcement; if the arrangements in a transaction seem convoluted, take two steps back and look at the big picture. If you're asked to send back some of your real cash in a transaction, the funds you've supposedly received are probably going to disappear, and you're left holding the empty bag. It is also a good time to remind all that warmer weather will bring out paving, roofing, and other home fix-up scams that come to your door. Again, advice from area law enforcement and the Better Business Bureau—check references and deal with licensed, insured local companies.