

Dodgy door-to-door traders

October 2008



Need more information?



Call Consumer Affairs Victoria on 1300 55 81 81.



Itinerant traders are dodgy or phoney tradespeople that go from door-to door seeking work; usually roof-painting, asphaltting or house painting. After pressuring people into having work done immediately for cash, itinerant traders either disappear without doing the work, or do the work so badly that they damage the property. Itinerant traders have no fixed address, move quickly from place to place and are extremely difficult to trace.



How do itinerant traders operate?

Itinerant traders gain work resurfacing driveways, maintaining roofs or painting houses by either door-knocking or cold call telephoning in areas where there are older houses. They often operate in rural and regional areas but have been known to also attack metropolitan suburbs. Many itinerant traders move in family groups and stay at local caravan parks.

Their vehicles are usually relatively recent models with little or no advertising of business names.

Vulnerable low income people who are home during the day are often the target of itinerant traders, especially elderly people.



Quick tip



A 10-day cooling-off period applies to all door-to-door sales.

This allows you to cancel the sale in that time period if you choose.

Quick tip



Say NO to any offer which makes you uncomfortable, puts you under pressure or makes you feel unsure or fearful.

When approaching victims itinerant traders will often:

- claim to be from well-known companies with evidence of fake letterheads, business cards and delivery notes
- claim to have asphalt left over from a job being done nearby so can offer a heavily discounted rate for work that they can do immediately
- offer an exceptionally low quote or a 'special price' that is only valid for that day because another customer has cancelled (sometimes what appears to be a low quote may not be that low at all)
- offer extremely low prices in exchange for cash payments
- offer to drive consumers to the bank so they can withdraw cash
- intimidate and pressure consumers into getting the work done immediately.

Itinerant traders invariably disappear without trace as soon as money is handed over. They usually leave the job unfinished or do such a poor job that the consumer has to spend even more money to pay a reputable tradesperson to fix the work.

How can consumers identify an itinerant trader?

Consumers should be very wary of phoney tradespeople who:

- offer services by door knocking or telephone cold calling
- have no real fixed address
- only use mobile phone numbers
- give their fixed address as a caravan park
- have no proof of identity
- give proof of identity, but allow no time to check their identity or credentials
- don't give written quotes
- offer a low verbal quote that is only valid for a short time
- discourage shopping around for other quotes
- apply pressure to do the work immediately
- use intimidation or scare tactics
- only accept upfront cash payments
- are not registered or have fake registration
- have no references
- offer transport to the bank to get cash
- drive relatively new model vehicles that carry little business identification or advertising

Protecting yourself against itinerant traders

Consumers can protect themselves against itinerant traders by checking the credentials of any tradesperson who seeks business by door knocking or cold calling.

To ensure that any offer being made is legitimate, you should:

- ask salespeople to show their company identification
- write down the person's, company's name, address, telephone number and car registration
- ask yourself and a family member or friend whether you really need the service being offered before you sign anything
- never accept door-to-door verbal quotes at face value
- always ask for a written quote
- always shop around for other written quotes for the same work and find out whether there is a cost for quoting
- ask for references from previous jobs and evidence of qualifications and professional registration
- ask about a warranty and get it in writing
- ask the tradesperson for written information about the 10-day cooling-off period that applies to door-to-door sales and allows you to cancel the sale

also:

- allow time to consider a written offer, shop around for other prices and check the tradesperson's credentials
- never agree to a verbal offer for services that have to commence immediately and require an immediate upfront cash payment
- say NO to any offer which makes you uncomfortable, puts you under pressure or makes you feel unsure or fearful
- remember: 'If it sounds too good to be true it usually is.'

What should you do if an itinerant trader calls?

- do not agree to have the work completed by them as you will only regret it later
- please call Consumer Affairs Victoria on 1300 55 81 81 to report your experience. This will help to stop these traders from scamming your neighbour or someone else in your community.

Shopping & Services Factsheet

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Further reading



Consumer Affairs Victoria has a range of shopping and service related factsheets:

- Bag searches
- Blowers
- Buying & servicing household electrical equipment
- Contracts
- Door-to-door and other contact sales
- Fair Trading Act—advertising requirements
- Fair Trading Act—information for consumers
- Fair Trading Act—information for traders
- Insurance
- Lay-by
- Pyramid selling
- Refunds
- Shopping tips
- Uncollected goods

Because this publication avoids the use of legal language, information about the law may have been summarised or expressed in general statements. This information should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional legal advice or reference to the actual legislation.

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More information



Further information on shopping & services can be viewed and downloaded at www.consumer.vic.gov.au.

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Regional Offices

Consumer Affairs Victoria also has regional offices located in Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Morwell, Mildura, Wangaratta and Warrnambool together with a mobile outreach service that regularly visits rural communities. To find details on the office or mobile service nearest you, ring 1300 55 81 81 or go to the Consumer Affairs Victoria website on www.consumer.vic.gov.au and click on the Contact Us link.