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DCA SEIZES FOUR VEHICLES IN STATEN ISLAND CONTRACTOR STING

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) today announced four vehicles owned by unlicensed home improvement contractors were seized last week in Staten Island by agency inspectors. Contractors who had their vehicles seized were required to pay \$1,000 in fines, resolve any outstanding complaints, pay into the DCA Home Improvement Trust Fund and agree to get licensed before retrieving their vehicle. Three contractors did so with one opting to go to an administrative hearing.

“Unlicensed contractors beware,” said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. “Our cross-trained inspectors in all five boroughs are on the lookout for anyone doing home improvement work without a license. Unlicensed contractors face substantial penalties and we’ll continue to seize the vehicles of those who flout the law. Our enforcement efforts will continue, but homeowners can also help by calling 311 and alerting us if they see a contractor working in their neighborhood without a license.”

The DCA seized vehicles belonging to the following contractors:

- Richard Sawvenero - d/b/a Absolute Home Improvement (2001 Ford van)
- J&B Construction and Jose Carcamo (1994 Ford pick-up)
- Joseph R. Tuite (2002 Ford van)
- Gaspare Cruciata (1990 Ford)

Additionally, DCA officials will attend the Staten Island Home Improvement Contractor Association Meeting held on Wednesday, October 8 to discuss the agency’s efforts in combating unlicensed contractors, the benefits of being licensed, and the agency’s new instant online database (found at www.nyc.gov/consumers) of all licensed contractors.

By law, any person or business that solicits, canvasses, sells, performs, or obtains home improvement work that costs more than \$200, must get a license from DCA to operate legally in New York City. Home improvement work can be any type of remodeling or repair including: awnings, basements, central heating/air conditioning, cabinet installation, central vacuum cleaning system, communications systems, driveways, fences, garages, landscaping, patios, porches, roofing, storm windows, swimming pools, and terraces.

Although a license does not ensure competence, requirements for contractors to operate legally provide further protection for consumers. License-holders are required to undergo a criminal history check, pass a written examination, have workers’ compensation insurance, and post a bond or pay into the DCA Home Improvement Contractor Trust Fund, which can provide up to \$15,000 in restitution to consumers – but only to those who use a licensed contractor.

Last year the DCA received nearly 700 home improvement complaints, the most of any DCA complaint category, and paid more than \$330,000 in restitution to consumers who were ripped off by unscrupulous contractors. Complaints include contractors abandoning a job before it is completed, not performing work to industry standards, and more. To request a license application, file a complaint, check a vendor’s complaint history, or to request a copy of the DCA Home Improvement Consumer Guide, call 311, or visit DCA online at www.nyc.gov/consumers.