

## **Southern Pines Police Department**

### **Safety Tips**

#### ***Solicitors***

#### ***Residential Solicitors***

Have you experienced door-to-door sales people trying to market a product or service? Are you a bit wary of their offers? Beware of offers that sound too good to be true – they probably are just that! The Southern Pines Police Department has investigated complaints of fraudulent contractors that offer “special” or “today only” savings as a tactic to pressure a homeowner into agreeing for work to be done. Before agreeing to a service, check with the Better Business Bureau or Better Contractors Bureau for references on the contractor you are considering. Also, ask the contractor for locations where they have completed work and check with those references. Only deal with local, established firms that will guarantee their work in writing. Obtain a complete description of the service to be provided and the price agreed upon, which should be signed by the contractor. Any change in the terms of the contract should also be made in writing and signed. “Door to Door” solicitors for property repair should be dealt with cautiously, as this is a main tactic of unethical repair people. The Town of Southern Pines Code of Ordinances prohibits persons from entering private, residential property for the purpose of soliciting business unless the person is invited by the property owner.

#### ***Commercial Solicitors***

Any business that operates in the Town of Southern Pines must have a current Business License. This includes businesses that solicit from public or commercial property. If the business person can't produce a Business License or if you consider their actions suspicious in any manner, call the Southern Pines Police Department for an officer to respond. We'll attempt to locate the individual and investigate their actions. Remember to get a full description of the person as well as a description and license plate of any vehicle they may be with and the last direction of travel. If the license plate is not from North Carolina, you should be especially wary as it may indicate the company has no ties to the area. Remember, that if you purchase something from a store, there is a good chance that the business will be there if you have a problem with the product. That same comfort may not be there when purchasing from a “mobile” vendor.

#### ***Panhandlers***

Have you ever been approached in a public place or at your business or residence by someone asking for money? Typically, a person on foot or bicycle approaches someone with a request for cash. The reasons given can range from needing gas for a car that ran out “just down the road” to medical, family or food needs. Sometimes the person ensures that he/she will pay back the money and asks for a name, address and phone number so a check can be mailed. While it is conceivable that these needs may truly exist, our experience during these investigations is that the suspect merely wants money for some other purpose and has no intention of returning the benefactor's funds. How should you handle these encounters? Certainly be aware of your personal space and take steps to protect yourself during the encounter. If you are inclined to provide money, ask questions about the specific need. If it is for gasoline and there is a gas station nearby, suggest that you go there and pay for the gas directly while the person waits at their disabled vehicle. Their reaction to your generosity may indicate if the need is legitimate or not. If you choose to give them money, never take out your wallet or a bundle of cash within reach of the person, and do not give out your home address or phone number. Never let them into your home or car, but take steps to help them in their time of need. That may be a phone call to a service station or to one of the social service agencies that can offer the help they might need. While it is often not apparent if the request is legitimate, let your conscience be your guide as you try to help others. But do so while keeping aware of your circumstances and your personal safety. Keep in mind that it is illegal to solicit money for personal gain in the Town of Southern Pines. Call the Southern Pines Police Department for an officer to respond and investigate. Be sure to provide a complete description and direction of travel to the Telecommunicator when you call.

**For more information or a presentation on this topic, contact the Community Services Coordinator at (910) 692-2732.**