

BBB Warns Consumers of Nationwide Locksmith Swindle

You may have been a victim and not even know it.

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) today is warning consumers to beware of untrustworthy locksmith companies that are ripping off consumers across the country.

Victim complaints to the BBB reveal that several locksmith companies, all using similar methods, are significantly overcharging consumers, charging consumers for unnecessary services, using intimidation tactics, and failing to give refunds or respond to consumer complaints.

"Ironically, these companies operate under names like 'Dependable Locksmith' but in reality they exploit the vulnerable situation of consumers who are locked out of their house or car," said Edward Johnson, President of the BBB. "We've found that some locksmiths have made taking advantage of consumers' misfortune part of their business model."

Complaints about locksmith services to the 114 BBBs serving the U.S. increased almost 75 percent from 2005 to 2006, and have continued to come in steadily during the first half of this year.

The BBB has identified Dependable Locksmith – which operates under more than a dozen different names – as a particularly disreputable locksmith. This company poses as a local locksmith in cities across the country and advertises in the yellow pages using local phone numbers and fake local addresses. A consumer might think they're dealing with a local locksmith but their phone call is actually connected to a call center located in the Bronx borough of New York City.

Consumers in the mid-Atlantic region are quoted a reasonable price over the phone but when the locksmith arrives – typically in an unmarked vehicle – he demands significantly more money than originally quoted, often only accepting cash.

A complaint where Dependable Locksmith was operating under the name "Superb Solutions," alleges the company quoted fees of \$39 and \$84 for separate jobs, but the bill ended up at \$471, which included add-on fees such as a \$65 breaking in fee and a \$58 fee to uninstall old locks.

Another complainant reported that the locksmith sent to let her into her car demanded she pay twice the price quoted over the phone. The locksmith offered to drive her to an ATM to get cash – feeling unsafe the victim refused. The victim was ultimately forced to write a check made out personally to the locksmith as he would not let her into her car until she did so. She cancelled payment on the check the next morning, but eventually filed a police report after the locksmith harassed her with continuous phone calls about payment.

The BBB has also heard many complaints from victims who say they were charged for unnecessary services. For example, complainants suspect locksmiths sent over by Dependable Locksmiths of pretending they couldn't simply pick the lock so that they could charge more and install all new locks in homes.

Some of Dependable Locksmith's aliases include, Superb Solutions, Locksmith 24 Hour, Inc., USA Total Security, Priceline Locksmith, and S.O.S. Locksmith.

Two other locksmith contractors fleecing consumers are Basad, Inc. – which operates under more than 50 names nationwide, such as A-1 Locksmith Service, A-1 24 Hour Locksmith, A-1 Lock & Key Locksmith, and AAA Locksmith 24 Hour – and Liberty Locksmith. Similar to Dependable Locksmith, they pose as local locksmiths and run full-page yellow pages ads with multiple phone and address listings. The phone numbers appear to be local, but connect to national call centers such as Liberty's in New York City, while the addresses end up belonging to other established businesses in the local area, or are simply non-existent.

"These companies are very good at posing as trustworthy locksmiths," said Mr. Johnson. "Before you find yourself in the unfortunate position of being locked out of your car or house, do your research and find a truly dependable locksmith in your area. Ask around and always check with the BBB first to find reputable businesses."

If you feel you've been taken advantage of by Dependable Locksmith, Liberty Locksmith, Basad, Inc., or others, please contact the BBB to file a complaint, or do so online at www.mybbb.org.

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