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MADIGAN FILES LAWSUITS IN SWEEP OF FRAUDULENT HOME REPAIR COMPANIES

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced she has filed five lawsuits in a sweep of fraudulent home repair businesses that cheated homeowners in Chicago and Central Illinois out of more than \$365,000.

Madigan said the companies operated home repair scams, soliciting homeowners for repair work and requiring large, upfront payments to begin the work. But the lawsuits allege the contractors failed to do much work – if any at all – beyond cashing homeowners' deposits. Madigan said in some cases, these con artists operated as "storm chasers," swooping into communities after severe storms to take advantage of people scrambling to repair damage to their homes.

"In all of these cases, there were red-flag warnings that the contractors were up to no good," Madigan said. "Any time a repair company solicits door to door or uses high-pressure tactics to sign up customers, it's a signal that something is wrong. I urge homeowners to use extreme caution when hiring contractors. Do your homework and ask plenty of questions before signing anything."

Madigan filed lawsuits against the following defendants:

- **National Restoration of Illinois and President John Curtis**, a Lake in the Hills-based company for allegedly operating as an unlicensed insurance adjuster, negotiating weather-related damages with a homeowner's insurance company. Homeowners were defrauded of their insurance checks intended for repair work that the company never completed.
- **Gulli Construction and owner Dominic Gulli**, based in Chicago, for allegedly soliciting homeowners door to door for roofing and other repair work though the defendant is not licensed. Madigan said Gulli disappeared for weeks after contracting work with homeowners.
- **North Point Exteriors Inc. and owner Lateef Farooqui**, based in Barrington, for allegedly offering unlicensed insurance adjusting services after storms in Chicago area communities. Madigan said these scammers operated as "storm chasers," soliciting vulnerable consumers door to door who never saw repairs completed.
- **Tropical Home Improvement Inc. and President Herberth Pulgarin**, based in Addison, for allegedly aggressively pursuing consumers for payment after performing no work and for offering unlicensed public adjusting services.
- **Randy Oaks & Sons Asphalt Paving and Seal Coating, Randy Oaks Sr. and Randy Oaks Jr.**, based in Urbana, for allegedly soliciting older citizens door to door for asphalt work. After consumers paid the contractors for the work, the defendants demanded additional payments of thousands of dollars more under the threat of verbal and physical intimidation in order to complete the contracted work.

Madigan's lawsuits ask the court to permanently ban the defendants from working in the home repair trade in Illinois, cancel any pending contracts with homeowners and obtain restitution for affected consumers. The lawsuits also seek to impose on the defendants an array of civil penalties for the allegations laid out in each of the complaints.

Madigan offered the following tips to help protect families and businesses from being duped by dishonest contractors:

- Be wary of contractors who go door to door to offer repair services. Home repair con artists are often transients who move quickly into a troubled area. Ask for recommendations from people you know and trust and, whenever possible, use established local contractors.
- Insurance adjusters must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Insurance, and roofers must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation. Ask to see required state or local permits or licenses.
- Call the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Hotline to determine if consumer complaints have been filed against a particular business.

- Even if there is a need to act quickly, shop around for the best deal. Get written estimates from multiple contractors and don't be rushed into a deal.
- Get all the terms of a contract in writing and obtain a copy of the signed contract. Never make full payment until all the work has been completed to your satisfaction and never pay in cash.

Madigan also reminded consumers that the Illinois Home Repair and Remodeling Act requires contractors to furnish customers with written contracts for any repair or remodeling work costing more than \$1,000. A contract must be signed by both the customer and the contractor. The law also requires contractors to carry at least minimum amounts of insurance for property damage, bodily injury and improper home repair. Contractors also must provide consumers with an informational pamphlet entitled "Home Repair: Know Your Consumer Rights."

Madigan urged homeowners to contact her Consumer Fraud Hotline, (800) 386-5438, to report being victimized by a home repair scheme or to learn tips for finding a reputable contractor.

Assistant Attorneys General Shannon DeLaMar, Junko Minami, Janice Parker and Eric Sirota are handling the cases for Madigan's Consumer Fraud Bureau.

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