

Contractor phishing scams target seniors

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So-called phishing scams (so named to sound like “fishing”) are designed to obtain people’s personal information—such as credit card numbers—over the internet for the purpose of stealing money. Like real fishing, phishing uses bait, perhaps in the form of an email or website that tricks people in to revealing personal information that scammers can use to steal money.

Phishing scams are typically limited to the internet though there is also a door-to-door variant. Unfortunately, the door-to-door phishing scam typically targets the most vulnerable, the elderly. The door-to-door phishing scam works like this: a contractor of some kind, such as a roofer, knocks on your door and tells you that your roof is in bad shape. Or they might offer to do an inspection, completely free of charge. This is the bait—the enticing offer. A free inspection or a great price on roof repair if you act now. If you take the bait, the scammer has you and will now try to get money out of you just like with a phishing scam. The free inspection uncovers serious roofing problems in need of immediate attention. The simple repair job suddenly becomes a huge project once the roofer gets up there and takes a closer look. There are hidden fees and upfront costs to be paid. If you’re lucky, you’ll just end up spending more than you should have to for the work. If you’re unlucky, the individual isn’t a contractor at all and will take your money and disappear.

More than one victim

The homeowner is the obvious victim in this scenario, but he/she isn’t the only one. Reputable contractors in the area are also negatively affected by these kinds of scams because it damages the reputation of all roofers when a person claiming to be a roofer makes off with someone’s money. In the event the “contractor” isn’t qualified to do the work, a real contractor has to be called in to undo the damage.

Tips for avoiding the door-to-door phishing scam

Homeowners need to remember that the two main elements of a phishing scam are the bait and gaining access to the person’s money. To avoid this scam, homeowners need only look for those two elements.

- Homeowners should be especially wary when they weren’t the ones to initiate the contact with a contractor. Reputable contractors have plenty of honest work. They typically don’t need to go door-to-door to drum up business.
- Homeowners should be wary of deals that are too-good-to-be-true. This is the bait.
- Homeowners should watch out for high pressure sales tactics. If the contractor is saying that you need to sign right this moment to get this deal, walk away.
- Homeowners should never pay a huge upfront deposit for work. Many contractors won’t accept payment until the job is done. At the very least, you shouldn’t pay more than a third of the total cost up front. Pay with a credit or debit card if you can so you can reverse the transaction if the contractor doesn’t complete the project.
- Finally, ask to see the contractor’s license and proof of insurance.

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Author: Tracy Vierra
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