

News Release

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BROADCAST-QUALITY VIDEO AVAILABLE (Clovis, Palos Verdes Estates, Sacramento, San Jose, Vista):

| STILL PHOTOS AVAILABLE

Google Drive: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6a4finjvd2obnI2aVhlaG1UazA/edit?usp=sharing>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOQ2Ug8Jb4E>

More than 120 Unlicensed Contractors Caught by CSLB in California Blitz

Repeat offenders underscore serious risks consumers take

SACRAMENTO – Dozens of people now may face criminal charges after being caught in simultaneous undercover sting operations conducted by the [Contractors State License Board](http://www.cslb.ca.gov) (CSLB) March 25-27, 2014, in nine California locations.

Among the 121 individuals arrested during CSLB's spring California Blitz were repeat offenders, a man who is awaiting trial on an assault with a deadly weapon charge, and someone who was caught in not one, but two different stings.

Investigators from CSLB's [Statewide Investigative Fraud Team \(SWIFT\)](http://www.cslb.ca.gov), along with partners from a variety of local law enforcement agencies, conducted the stings in Bass Lake (Madera County), Clovis (Fresno County), Dana Point (Orange County), Hanford (Kings County), Palos Verdes Estates (Los Angeles County), Sacramento (Sacramento County), San Jose (Santa Clara County), Vista (San Diego County), and Woodland (Yolo County).

SWIFT investigators posed as homeowners seeking bids for home improvements such as painting, drywall, landscaping, decking, cabinets, flooring, fencing, masonry, concrete, and tree removal work.

After seeing his ad posted on craigslist.org, CSLB investigators invited Martin Villegas, of North Highlands, to the Sacramento sting. Villegas showed up with two other men and gave a \$1,200 bid for landscaping work. That led to his first Notice to Appear (NTA) for contracting without a license.

His brush with the law didn't appear to slow down Villegas. The next day he showed up after being invited to a sting location in nearby Woodland. Villegas gave a different team of CSLB undercover investigators a \$2,150 bid for exterior painting, landscaping, and concrete work.

That led to Villegas's second NTA in two days.

One suspect caught in the Clovis sting is actually a licensed contractor. But, Jeffrey Daniel Jimenez's license ([#849108](http://www.cslb.ca.gov)) was suspended last September after he failed to reimburse his bond company for a \$1,700 payout it made to a consumer.

A number of the suspects targeted during the operation were on CSLB's radar after having consumer complaints filed against them. In one case, a suspect was cited by CSLB after a refusing to take care of a paint job he botched. The suspect was more than willing to give an undercover investigator \$1,200 bid for painting. That earned the suspect a date in front of a superior court judge.

Of the 121 individuals arrested, 115 now may face misdemeanor charges for contracting without a license

([Business and Professions Code section 7028](#)). The penalty for a conviction is up to six months in jail and/or a fine of up to \$5,000.

Ninety-four suspects also may be charged with illegal advertising ([Business and Professions Code section 7027.1](#)). State law requires contractors to place their license number in all print, broadcast, and online advertisements. Those without a license can advertise to perform jobs valued at less than \$500, but the ad must state that they are not a licensed contractor. The penalty is a fine of \$700 to \$1,000.

Seven others may be charged with requesting an excessive down payment ([Business and Professions Code section 7159.5](#)). In California, a home improvement project down payment cannot exceed 10 percent of the contract total or \$1,000, whichever is less. This misdemeanor charge carries a maximum penalty of six months in jail and/or up to a \$5,000 fine.

Nineteen of the phony contractors also were issued Stop Orders ([Business and Professions Code section 7127](#)). CSLB investigators can halt job site activity when any person with or without a contractor license does not have workers' compensation insurance coverage for employees. Failure to comply with a Stop Order can result in misdemeanor charges and penalties, including 60 days in jail and/or up to \$10,000 in fines.

Blitz totals may increase as some suspects are expected to provide their bids to undercover investigators via text, email or fax at a later date. A majority of those caught this week were identified through illegal ads posted on [craigslist.org](#).

STING NOTES

Palos Verdes Estates (Los Angeles County)

- Repeat offender with \$35,000 arrest warrant for failing to appear in court to face a previous charge of contracting without a license
- Repeat offender bid \$48,000 to install a new driveway

Dana Point (Orange County)

- Suspect with pending trial for assault with a deadly weapon charge
- Suspect targeted after tip to CSLB from licensed contractor who had lost many jobs to unlicensed operator

Vista (San Diego County)

- Repeat offender previously caught in 2009 sting

San Jose (Santa Clara County)

- Investigators found an unusually large number of illegal advertisements in Yellow Pages phone book

Sacramento (Sacramento County)

- Repeat offenders with numerous complaints on file with CSLB caught
- Suspect caught on first day of operation, then set to give bid on second day in Woodland

Woodland (Yolo County)

- Suspect caught previous day in Sacramento gives bid and is caught a second time in two days
- One suspect arrived late to give bid due to taking exam for his CSLB license

Bass Lake (Madera County)

- Three of five people caught also were issued stop orders

Clovis (Fresno County)

- Suspect with suspended license caught
- Suspect caught who failed his CSLB license exam at least six times
- Vehicle towed because suspect had never been licensed, and had three prior Driving Under Influence cases

- Eight Stop Orders issued

Hanford (Kings County)

- Seven Stop Orders issued

“Unlicensed, uninsured operators are in your neighborhoods every day, putting you – and your family – at risk,” said CSLB [Registrar Steve Sands](#). “Home improvement projects are expensive, so always make sure you’re hiring a licensed contractor who can do the job right the first time.”

NTA tallies and details from each sting location are available by contacting Steve Breen or Melanie Bedwell in CSLB’s Public Affairs Office (see page one contacts).

Participating agencies from blitz are noted below.

Location	Notices to Appear	Partner Agencies
Palos Verdes Estates <i>Los Angeles County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	6	Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office Palos Verdes Estates Police Departments Palos Verdes Estates Code Enforcement
Dana Point <i>Orange County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	13	Orange County District Attorney’s Office Orange County Sheriff’s Department
Vista <i>San Diego County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	16	San Diego County District Attorney’s Office San Diego County Sheriff’s Department
San Jose <i>Santa Clara County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	19	Santa Clara County District Attorney’s Office
Sacramento <i>Sacramento County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	23	Sacramento County District Attorney’s Office
Woodland <i>Yolo County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	18	Yolo County District Attorney’s Office Woodland Police Department
Bass Lake <i>Madera County</i> <i>March 27 Only</i>	5	Madera County Sheriff’s Department
Clovis <i>Fresno County</i> <i>March 25-26</i>	14	Fresno County District Attorney’s Office Clovis Police Department
Hanford <i>Kings County</i> <i>March 26 Only</i>	7	Kings County District Attorney’s Office

CSLB encourages consumers to always “Check the License First” by visiting www.cslb.ca.gov or calling CSLB’s toll-free automated line 800.321.CSLB (2757). Also, visit CSLB’s website for [tips](#) about how to hire a contractor and to sign up for [CSLB email alerts](#).

The California Contractors State License Board operates under the umbrella of the Department of Consumer Affairs. CSLB licenses and regulates California’s 300,000 contractors, and is regarded as one of the leading consumer protection agencies in the United States. In fiscal year 2012-13, CSLB helped recover nearly \$44 million in ordered restitution for consumers.

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