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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **18 PEOPLE CITED FOR ILLEGAL CONTRACTING IN MERCED UNDERCOVER STING OPERATION**

Merced County District Attorney Investigators and the Contractors State License Board held an undercover operation last week in Merced that resulted in 18 misdemeanor citations to people engaging in contracting work without a contractor's license, false advertising, and failing to carry worker's compensation insurance, announced Supervising Investigator Anna Hazel.

According to Hazel, all 18 people were cited for contracting without a license and for false advertising after providing estimates to undercover personnel at a staged job site over the course of two days last week. A state contractor's license is required when the quoted value of the construction materials and/or labor exceed \$500 and it is required for unlicensed contractors to state in their advertisements that they are unlicensed.

Additionally, seven people were cited for not having the required workers' compensation insurance to cover their workers and seven people were cited with charging more than 10% or \$1,000 for a down payment for the job.

CSLB Registrar David Fogt said, "It's common that unlicensed contractors don't cover their workers with insurance in case they get hurt. Cutting corners like this allows them to offer lower prices, but it presents a big risk for homeowners. If a contractor doesn't have workers' compensation insurance to cover employees, the homeowner can be liable for medical costs related to an accident on their property."

"It can be tempting for homeowners to get lured in by what may seem like a good deal at first, but they should do their due diligence to make sure they're hiring qualified workers," Fogt added. "Additional costs can incur later that the homeowner may not be prepared for."

On Wednesday, March 21, citations were issued to Christopher Dickerson, Juan Gallegos, Dwight Torrence, and Gabriel Fausette from Merced, Thomas Chisholm and Kimberly Yates from Newman, Rogelio Avalas from Winton and Hector Fausto from Gustine.

On Thursday, March 22, citations were issued to Albert Acevedo Jr., and Jesus Alvarez of Merced, Jacob Toscano and Alex Diaz of Los Banos, Kyle

Hutchens and Rick Trillo of Modesto, Joshua Wilmoth of Denair, Richard Martinez of Selma and Steve Martin of Santa Nella. Annie Waidtlow of Carlsbad was also cited and her case was referred to the DA's office for consideration of additional criminal charges.

Investigators found the cited contractor's advertisement's on Facebook, Craigslist, or on business cards provided to vendors or potential customers. After identifying the suspected unlicensed contractors, undercover personnel invited the individual's to place bids on different construction projects at a location in Merced where the operation was held.

All 18 people will appear on the misdemeanor charges in Merced County Superior Court on June 13, 2018 where they face up to one year in jail and various fines. All individuals cited were provided with informational material related to worker's compensation and contracting law.

If you are considering a construction project over \$500, please ask any contractor you are considering for the job if they are licensed in the state of California. Then consult the Contractors State Licensing Board website at [www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov) prior to hiring any contractor to complete the work. The website allows for consumers to verify online that the contractor they are considering is licensed, bonded and covered by worker's compensation insurance.