



## **[Traveling scammers target Greenbrier elderly \(http://www.register-herald.com/local/x1075322522/Traveling-scammers-target-Greenbrier-elderly\)](http://www.register-herald.com/local/x1075322522/Traveling-scammers-target-Greenbrier-elderly)**

By Kara Van Pelt

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LEWISBURG — A group of travelers known for scamming the elderly was spotted in Greenbrier County Monday, but according to Lewisburg Police Sgt. Dave Howard, the problem has been “nipped in the bud” as the group left town to continue their way up the East Coast.

Howard said the group was originally from the North Augusta area of South Carolina, and their M.O. (modus operandi) was to find unsuspecting seniors by approaching their homes and offering to pave their driveway for a discounted price. However, Howard said the group simply applies a layer of petroleum and black paint that washes away after the first rain.

“So when this group makes that initial encounter, they usually tell the person or persons they have this leftover material and they will make you a really good deal. They’ll say \$600, \$800 or \$900, and they’ll do the work,” Howard explained.

“In the meantime, when they approach the senior for payment, they will say they need more than originally quoted. They usually have one or two big, buff guys that will stand over the senior and pressure them for the payment, offering to take them to the bank and even getting extra funds for promising not to return.”

Howard said he discovered the group when responding to a malfunctioning fire alarm at a local motel.

“I noticed the vehicles backed in, I saw the evidence of the paint and the sealer, and when I saw the South Carolina plates, I checked the registration, called that jurisdiction, and man, I hit the nail on the head,” Howard said.

“I knew that we needed to do something and do it quickly, and after talking with the captain of the North Augusta, S.C., area police, he said, ‘The best thing you can do is help them out of town,’ and we did.

“When we made our first encounter we said, ‘Hey, we have talked to the jurisdiction where you are from, and I think it is in your best interests to move on.’”

Howard said this has been a problem for many years, and even NBC’s Dateline has run specials to educate the public.

“They are also notorious for, while they have the homeowner at bay, finding access to the home and pilfering it for valuables — whatever they can grab and get,” Howard said. “They can talk the talk and walk the walk. They wrote the book on this.

“I had the opportunity to stop in the Aiken/North Augusta area after working with the Aiken Sheriff’s Department, and these people live in gated communities,” he added. “In some cases, when we get access to the vehicles, we will find extra license plates in there that they like to change because when they get into an area, they like to keep a low profile. They often lack identification and have several aliases.”

Howard said the group encouraged to leave the area Monday was driving an early 2000 model green Dodge pickup with Ohio registration; a “rough looking” silver and white 1995 Chevrolet pickup with a lot of black paint on it and a kerosene tank in the back with South Carolina tags; and a 2007 white Chevrolet extended cab pickup with South Carolina tags.

“Do not engage in conversation,” Howard warns residents.

“You really do not want to engage in conversation with these people because they are very well articulated, and when they get a conversation going, it is very hard to get away from them,” he said.

“I would encourage people in the reading area to find out how you can help them, ask for a business card, and when they don’t produce it, shut the door in their face and don’t deal with them.

“We were prepared and are happy we were able to nip it in the bud and save both ourselves and our community a lot of heartache,” Howard added.

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