

## Sure and Safe at Home

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As our population grows and ages, so do the services and agencies that hope to serve them. While there are some regulations for operating businesses in our area, don't assume that a business card and pretty brochure provide any assurance of integrity. A recent case on the lower mainland of a home support worker, with a gambling addiction, swindling her client out of thousands of dollars is a sad example of how vulnerable a senior wanting to stay at home can be. Apparently the agency employing this worker had not performed any kind of background check and while this may not assure that bad hires don't slip through, it will give those with less than genuine intentions, second thoughts on attempting such acts.

If you are considering hiring any kind of service to enter your home, be sure to carefully check references, background, hiring practices and reputation. Ask neighbours, family and friends if they have had any experience with the business you are considering. A reputable business will happily provide references and will encourage you to contact them before work is started. If the business person in question hesitates or tries to skip this step as unimportant, proceed with caution. They may not have your best interests at heart.

Home support workers should have had criminal background checks done; driver's abstracts provided (if applicable) and character references from numerous sources. Good agencies will be proud to boast their rigorous hiring practices and the pride they have in the integrity of their personnel. Some important questions to ask are:

- What kind of services does the agency provide?
- How long have they been in business?
- Are the workers insured and/or bonded?
- Does the agency supply references for itself, its officers and its workers?
- What kind of checks does the agency perform before hiring the worker?
- What are my rights and responsibilities?
- What are the worker's rights and responsibilities?
- Do the workers undergo any special training?
- What are the fees? Are there minimums for service?
- What happens on holidays, sick days or with emergencies?
- What happens if I am unhappy with the service?
- Does the agency have policies and procedures in place to address all contingencies?

The most important point is that you have every right to ask these pertinent questions and more. It is your home and your safety, so be sure to do all that is required to protect yourself. Do your homework and then get that help. A few hours a week of competent help can keep you safe and happy in your own home for years to come. In my next article, a discussion of the surprising variety of home services available.