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**UNSCRUPULOUS REMODELER RECEIVES TIME IN JAIL FOR
ENGAGING IN DECEPTIVE PRACTICES**

El Paso County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal today announced the sentencing of an El Paso resident accused of engaging in Deceptive Business Practices.

On February 26, 2013, 35-year-old Jesus Cruz pled guilty to one count of committing a Deceptive Business Practice, a crime punishable by up to one year in jail and/or a fine not to exceed \$4,000. In addition, Cruz admitted to violating the terms of probation in another Deceptive Business Practice case.

In the new case, the victim paid Cruz \$4,000 in advance to remodel his home. The State alleged that the repairs were never delivered. In the older case, Cruz was placed on probation and ordered to pay the homeowner more than \$800, but even then failed to do so. In both cases, the Court sentenced the Defendant to 300 days in jail.

El Paso County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal expressed her satisfaction on the outcome of the case.

“My office tries to protect El Paso consumers from unscrupulous contractors and con-artists. This case is another example of a legal resource available to bring justice to the victims of El Paso County,” Bernal said.

The El Paso County Attorney’s Office recommends residents who are planning on doing renovations or improvements to their homes, to do some homework before hiring anyone. It is highly recommended to first check the contractor’s references and business record with the Better Business Bureau and with our office.

Homeowners can also look up the criminal and civil case histories of prospective contractors on the County's website at www.epcounty.com/records.

The El Paso County Attorney's Office warns consumers against paying out large down payments and only if necessary, scheduling 'progress payments'- periodic payments made only after designated portions of work have been successfully completed.

"Consumers must be very cautious when paying money up front. Once the consumer has given money to an unscrupulous contractor, it is very difficult for us to get the money back even after the Defendant has pled guilty and been placed on probation," Bernal said.

"We recommend the public not pay the complete amount of the contract until after the job is finished, and the homeowner is satisfied with the quality of the work," Bernal concluded.

Residents who might have fallen victims of fraud or deceptive business practices are asked to contact the Criminal Section of the County Attorney's Office at 546-2050.

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