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**CON-ARTIST RECEIVES SEVERE SENTENCE FOR
REPEATEDLY DEFRAUDING LOCAL CONSUMERS**

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez announced today the sentencing of a local contractor accused of defrauding an El Paso resident while on probation for similar charges.

On Wednesday August 27th at County Court at Law #1, Lorenzo Hernandez, owner of “*L H Refrigeration*”, pled guilty to one charge of Deceptive Business Practices and was sentenced to one year in jail. However, because Hernandez was on probation at the time he committed the offense, County Court at Law #1 Judge Ricardo Herrera revoked his probation and sentenced him to 2 additional years in prison, for a total of 3 years.

According to court records, on June 15, 2007, Hernandez was paid more than \$2,600 to install refrigerated air in an East El Paso residence. When the defendant failed to install the refrigerated air as represented, the victim contacted the City of El Paso and discovered that Hernandez was not licensed to provide the services, and that the business address and phone number he had given were false.

The defendant was arrested on June 18, 2008, and today he pleaded guilty to one count of Deceptive Business Practice, which carries a maximum sentence of 1 year in prison. Hernandez was on probation for a Criminal Mischief and Theft charges prosecuted by the District Attorney’s Office, and a Deceptive Business Practice and one Theft by Check charges prosecuted by the County Attorney’s Office.

County Attorney José R. Rodríguez said this case illustrated how important it is for consumers to hire only licensed and bonded contractors, and why consumers should avoid as much as possible giving money upfront when hiring individuals to do construction work in their homes.

“Consumers must be very cautious when it comes to giving builders money up front. Once the consumer has given money to the unscrupulous contractor, it is very difficult for us to get it back. This is why we recommend to the public to pay the complete amount of the contract only after the job is finished, and after corroborating the quality of the goods or services received,” Rodríguez said.

For more information about the case, please contact Kent Sutton at 546-2050.

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