

Do's and Don'ts of Hiring a Contractor

Unlicensed Contractors can be very appealing and persuasive—do not get hooked. They tend to prey on the elderly and vulnerable but will also victimize busy property owners who want a job done quickly.

Here are some things to do to avoid being victimized by unlicensed contractors.

1.) **DO YOUR HOMEWORK—DO YOUR HOMEWORK—DO YOUR HOMEWORK** even before starting the smallest project. Time spent studying the project, comparing prices and verifying licenses and the need for permits is time well spent avoiding headaches later.

2.) Even if a person advertises that they are licensed and bonded do not take their work for it—check it out.

3.) Always demand a written contract that includes a proposed start and end date. Make sure that the contract includes the full name and address of the person/company you are intending to hire. Be wary of a company that uses a post office box as their mailing address. Many legitimate companies use post office boxes—but someone who is not legitimate is not as easy to track down if they use a post office box. Lastly, the contractor should have printed or written their state license number on the contract. This allows for easy verification.

4.) Always verify the contractor's license before signing any contract. In Virginia a person/company needs to have a State Class A, B or C contractor's license. In addition, in Fairfax County a Class C contractor must also have a local Home Improvement License if they intent to contract with a homeowner. In other

jurisdictions please check with your local Building Official to see if there are additional licensing requirements. These licenses are to show competency not licenses for tax purposes.

TO CHECK FOR A STATE CONTRACTORS LICENSE YOU CAN EITHER CALL 804-367-8511 OR CHECK THE STATE WEB SITE AT www.dpor.state.va.us/regulantlookup/.

To check a Fairfax County home improvement contractor's license call 703 324-1937. Fairfax City does not require a separate home improvement contractor's license.

5.) Make sure that the Contractor has the correct State Contractor's license to do your job. For example, Class A contractors generally can do large commercial jobs, new home construction and large remodeling jobs over \$120,000. Class B Contractors can generally do small additions and remodeling jobs. Class C contractors can only take contracts for job \$7500.00 or less.

6.) Make sure that the name and address on the contract match the name and address on the License. If a party represents themselves as a Sales Person for a company request the Company's license and verify the information.

7.) Do not pay any more than 10% to 30% upfront, most legitimate businesses can sustain expenses for a small project and may not require an upfront payment.

8.) Check with your local Building Official to determine if permits are needed for the work you wish to have performed. Other than smaller repair jobs, most work needs permits. In Fairfax County call 703 324-1555 to determine if your project needs a permit/s.

9.) Check the web site for the Fairfax County Dept. Telecommunications and Consumer Protection to determine if

there have been complaints against the contractor you wish to hire. The web site is www.fairfaxcounty.gov/consumer.

10.) Make sure that all permits are in the name of the contractor or one of their subcontractors. DO NOT sign a waiver allowing the contractor to pull the permit in your name—The permit should be in the name of the individual or company doing the work.

11.) Get references (3 is the usual suggestion) and do a thorough check of the jobs. Make sure the work you want to have done is similar to what the references contracted for. Ask questions about issues of concern such as timeliness of work, clean-up during the job and post completion response to problems.

12.) If the price sounds too good to be true—it is. Legitimate, licensed businesses pay fees and expenses related to their licensing and make payments to funds that protect the consumer. Thus, their legitimate business expenses are higher than fly by night contractors.

Penelope Anne Rood
Code Enforcement Coordinator III
County of Fairfax
DPWES
Code Enforcement Branch
703 324-1937