



BEWARE OF HOME REPAIR SCAMS

Investigate Contractors | Shop Around | Get a Written Contract | Don't be Pressured

WARNING SIGNS – AVOID A CONTRACTOR OR SALESMAN WHO:

- Knocks on your door or calls you on the phone offering to make repairs.
- Tells you that you must make repairs immediately.
- Talks very quickly to confuse you and pressures you to sign a contract immediately.
- Tells you they are doing work in your neighborhood and have extra materials left from another job.
- Offers a discounted price if you refer other people to them, but only if you buy today.
- Tells you something that sounds too good to be true. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!
- Is not an established local business, but has come to the area from somewhere else to “help.”

TO PROTECT YOURSELF:

- Avoid unlicensed contractors in NYC, Nassau, Suffolk, Putnam, Rockland, Westchester – these are areas of the State where a license is required. Unlicensed contractors are operating illegally in those areas.
- Avoid contractors who don't have references or whose references can't be reached.
- Avoid contractors who tell you there's no need for a written contract. By law, all contracts for \$500 or more must be in writing, but it's a good idea to get a written contract even for smaller projects.
- Avoid contractors who only have a P.O. Box address or a only a cell phone number.
- Avoid contractors who do not supply proof of insurance.
- Avoid contractors who ask you to get required building permits. It could mean that the contractor is unlicensed or has a bad track record and is therefore reluctant to deal with the local building inspector.
- Verify with your local building department that the contractor has obtained all the necessary permits.
- Be wary of contractors who ask for money to buy materials before starting the job. Reliable, established contractors can buy materials on credit.
- Avoid contractors who demand payment in cash or want full payment up front, before work has begun. Instead, find a contractor who will agree to a payment schedule providing for an initial down payment and subsequent incremental payments until the work is completed.
- Always withhold final payment until you have completed a final walk through, approved all the completed work, and all required inspections and certificates of occupancy have been delivered to you.

FOLLOW THIS CHECKLIST TO FIND A CONTRACTOR TO REPAIR YOUR HOME

Check out contractors:

- Ask how long they have been in business
- Ask for references
- Check references!
- Search online resources
- Ask if they guarantee or warrantee their work

Make sure they are:

- licensed
- bonded
- insured

Ask to see:

- insurance policy, or certificate of insurance

Get estimates:

- Get at least two estimates
- Compare costs, materials, and methods

Demand a written contract that includes:

- detailed description of the work to be performed
- exactly what materials will be used and their quality
- starting date and estimated completion date
- price
- payment arrangements
- finance charges (if applicable)

Before you sign a contract:

- read the contract yourself (don't rely on the salesperson to read it for you)
- make sure you understand everything in the contract

Do not sign a contract that:

- is missing information or has blank pages
- you don't understand
- is different from what you discussed with the contractor

Retain copies of:

- your signed contract
- all other signed documents
- guarantees or warrantees on work or materials

Upon project completion:

- inspect the work to make sure it is done properly
- do not make a final payment or sign completion certificate until the work is completed to your satisfaction

Many companies give free inspections and written estimates - get two or three before choosing a contractor. The lowest price is not always the best deal. Compare costs, materials, and methods suggested by different companies to decide what materials and methods are best for your home.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN THE VICTIM OF A SCAM

If you think you have been the victim of a scam, contact a lawyer immediately. There are time limits to cancel sales and pursue legal claims.

Contact the Department of Financial Services, your district attorney or the Attorney General's Office.

If you have a problem with a home improvement contractor and can't resolve it yourself, file a complaint with the New York Department of State online at www.dos.ny.gov or call (800) 697-1220.

Contact your insurance company, agent or broker to get answers to specific questions about policies or claims.

If you need more help, call DFS at (800) 342-3736 between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

For disaster related questions call the DFS Disaster Hotline 24/7 at (800) 339-1759.