



Tip-Offs to Potential Rip-Offs

Not all contractors operate within the law or regulations. Here are some warning signs. Watch out for scams or an unlicensed contractor who:

- Solicits door-to-door
- “Just happens” to have materials left over from a previous job
- Pressures you into making an immediate decision
- Asks you to pay for the entire job up-front
- Only accepts cash payments
- Asks you to obtain required building permits
- Doesn't list a local business number on the Internet or local phone book.

compensation, and other legal liabilities. A properly licensed contractor should not have any concerns about pulling the permits for the job and assuming these responsibilities.

When Problems Occur

Even when proper precautions are taken, problems will sometimes occur with the work that was done. If problems do arise, either during construction or afterward, contact the contractor first. Usually he or she will make corrections willingly. Be sure to address all problems or complaints directly to your contractor in writing, so that there is a clear record. If the contractor refuses to make corrections, a written complaint can be filed with the State Board of Contractors (www.dpor.virginia.gov). It may also be advisable to consult an attorney for legal advice.

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Hiring a Contractor



FAUQUIER COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
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TIPS FOR HIRING A CONTRACTOR

Most licensed contractors are competent, honest, hardworking, and financially responsible. And yet almost everyone knows someone who has a nightmare story to tell about a remodeling job: the length of time it took; the inconvenience of the noise and dust; or the cost overruns associated with even the smallest project. There are many steps a consumer can take to avoid ending up with problems, including starting the process with clearly defining the work to be done.

Choose a Licensed Contractor

If the work you are considering is valued at \$1,000 or more, a valid Virginia Contractor's License is required by state law for the license category in which the contractor is to work. Licensed contractors are subject to laws designed to protect the consumer. Licensing helps assure that the contractor possesses the necessary education and experience to perform the particular work. Also, by hiring a licensed contractor, the consumer is eligible to receive monetary compensation from a state fund in case of improper or dishonest contractor conduct.

There are more than 40 different types of contractor licenses, including general and specialty contractors. For more information about the type of contractor needed for a specific job, see the Board for Contractor Regulations on the Dept. of Professional and Occupational Regulations (DPOR) website (www.dpor.virginia.gov).

Check the Contractor's References

Ask the contractor for local references, and call them to see if they were satisfied with the

contractor's work. Skilled contractors will be proud to take credit for their work. If possible, go out and look at finished projects. Some consumers even try to find jobs in progress to see how the contractor works and to speak with the homeowner about work habits or inconveniences. Remember, the person you hire to work on your home will be a part of your home and your life until the job is completed.

Get Competitive Bids for the Project

The objective is to ensure your expressed needs are addressed within budget. Develop a clear scope of work, detailed plans and a comprehensive budget. The time spent in careful planning sets the stage for success with your project. Make sure all bids are based on the same set of specifications. Do not automatically accept the lowest bid. Discuss bids in detail with each contractor to understand the reasons for variations in the bids. Sometimes a higher price may be worth it, if the materials to be used are of higher quality or the work is more extensive. Don't forget the old adage, "If the offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is!"

Have a Contract

Don't assume that a "contract" looks like a contract; anything signed by the consumer could be used by a contractor as authorization to go

forward with the project. This means that any bid or estimate that is signed may become the contract. A consumer should not sign anything until he completely understands what he is signing and agrees to all terms. Make sure everything is in the contract, including the scheduling of the work.

Schedule the Payments

Some contractors may ask for periodic payments during the course of the project – such payments are usually called a "draw" and how often the payments are made is called a "draw schedule." If a contractor wants payments made according to a draw schedule, be sure that the specifics of that schedule are listed in detail in the contract. A draw schedule should be based on progress made toward project completion and never on a date. DPOR provides examples of good draw schedules on their website.

Be Sure that the Contractor Gets a Building Permit

A contract should call for the work to be performed in accordance with all applicable building codes. The consumer should insist that a contractor secure all required building permits. Keep in mind that building codes only set minimum safety standards for construction – they do not protect a consumer against poor quality work. While property owners are allowed under state law to pull the building permits for projects done on their primary residence, it is advisable that the permit be pulled by the contractor for a job. The permit holder becomes the general contractor under the law and assumes responsibility for the overall job – which may include taxes, workers'

