

Tips

After a Disaster, Don't Get Scammed!

If your home or property has been damaged by a fire, flood, earthquake or other disaster, don't let unscrupulous individuals take advantage of you during this vulnerable time. Please follow these tips/guidelines before you hire a contractor or sign any documents for repairs.

- Don't rush into repairs, no matter how badly they are needed.
- Get at least three bids. Don't hire the first contractor who comes along.
- Be cautious about door-to-door offers of repair services and flyers or business cards that are left at your door.
- Ask friends, family and associates for recommendations about contractors they have used.
- NEVER pay in cash.
- Even for the smallest job, require proof of a contractor's license or registration for the type of work that needs to be done.
- Get a written contract that details every aspect of the work plan.



Additional Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
Phone (800) 621-3362
www.fema.gov

Better Business Bureau
Phone (703) 276-0100
www.bbb.org

Federal Trade Commission
Phone (202) 326-2222
www.ftc.gov

State Consumer Protection Agencies
Phone (844) 872-4681
www.usa.gov/state-consumer

National Association of Attorney's General
Phone (202) 326-6000
www.naag.org

This valuable information is provided courtesy of:



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE CONTRACTORS LICENSING AGENCIES

23309 North 17th Drive · Unit 110
Phoenix, Arizona 85027
Phone (623) 587-9354
Fax (623) 587-9625
www.nascla.org

A Consumer's Guide to Protecting Yourself After a Disaster



Actions

Get It In Writing

Obtain a written contract that clearly states all tasks to be performed, all associated costs and the payment schedule. Any guarantees made by the contractor should be written into the contract. The guarantee should clearly state what is guaranteed, who is responsible for the guarantee and how long the guarantee is valid. Avoid verbal promises, agreements or contracts.

Avoid Payment Pitfalls

Don't let the payments get ahead of the work. Keep records of all payments and receipts. Avoid on-the-spot cash payments. The safest method of payment is by check. Make sure you have the names of subcontractors and material suppliers, and confirmation that they have been paid.

If You Have A Complaint

If you have problems with a licensed or unlicensed contractor, there are places to turn:

- File complaints against contractors at your local state regulatory agency.
- Contact the Consumer Division of your local district attorney's office.
- Call your local sheriff or police department if a crime is in progress.



Licensed

Only Hire A Licensed or Registered Contractor

- Deal only with state licensed or registered contractors.
- Get proof that the contractor you may be working with is licensed/registered. Contact your state's regulatory agency to check the status of their license. Only work with currently licensed/registered contractors.
- Some out-of-state contractors and unlicensed contractors want to help with rebuilding in disaster areas; however, it is illegal and punishable as a felony to perform contracting work in a declared disaster area without a contractor's license.
- Get the contractor's license number and check its history by contacting your local state regulatory agency.
- Ask your contractor for three written references. When speaking with the references ask if they were satisfied with the contractor's work and if the contractor kept to the schedule and contract terms.
- Require a written contract. The contract should be a detailed description of the work to be done, the material to be used and the equipment to be installed. Be sure there is a schedule of payments and a timeline for when the work will be completed. Be sure you understand the contract before you sign it. Any changes that occur should be noted in writing.
- Contact your local building official or authority to see if permits are required and to assure code compliance before construction to protect your health, safety and welfare.
- Before making the final payment make sure that you are satisfied with the completed work. Verify that any and all liens have been released.

Notice

Other Considerations

- With service and repair contracts, the consumer's 3-day right to cancel expires when the work begins. Check the paperwork before you sign to determine if it is a home improvement contract or a service and repair contract.
- Renters should check with their landlords and their rental agreements about damages and repairs. Major repairs are almost always the responsibility of the landlord. Renter insurance policies may cover personal property damage.
- If you're a homeowner, contact your insurance company to find out what's covered and how to proceed.

