

**Office of the New Hampshire
Attorney General
Consumer Protection and
Antitrust Bureau
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HOME REPAIR AND IMPROVEMENT: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

In order to properly prepare for a home repair or improvement project, it is important to know your rights so that you can ask informed questions and get the proper information. Obtaining

complete and accurate information before committing yourself by signing a contract will help both you and your contractor to avoid complications and misunderstandings.

When planning a home improvement or repair project, be sure to gather information about both the contractor and the work to be performed.

Before Hiring a Contractor

1. Ask around. Some of the best information about contractors can be obtained from friends and family.
2. Ask for references. But don't stop there. Call the people given as references and ask if they were satisfied with the contractor's work.
3. Talk with the contractors. Ask them questions, and tell them what you want. This will be the first, and maybe best chance for you to communicate what you are looking for and if they can provide it.
4. Shop around. If you are getting bids on the work you want done, don't pick the lowest bid simply because it is the lowest. Choose a bid because it is the right price for the right work.

5. Look around. See if you can look at previous work done by a contractor.
6. Call the Consumer Protection Bureau and the Better Business Bureau and ask whether the contractor has a good business reputation or a history of complaints.

Things to Ask

1. How long have you been in business?
2. Are you insured?
3. Have you done projects like this before? How many? When?
4. Will this require permits? Who will be responsible for getting the necessary permits?
5. Do you have any references?
6. Will you be using subcontractors? If so, who?

The Contract

When you have decided which contractor to hire it will be time to sign a contract. Don't be pressured into signing something you are not comfortable with or that does not meet your needs. Things to look for in the contract:

- Contractor's information.
(Name, address, telephone)

Make sure to get a physical location for the business, not just a post office box.

- Estimate(s) in writing and what happens if the estimate is inaccurate.
- No blank spaces or unexplained terms.
- Description of the work to be done.
- Start and end dates.
- Total cost.
- Schedule of ALL payments.
- How to cancel the contract, and how a refund will be handled.
- A lien waiver for the work of subcontractors.
- How change orders will be handled

These are things to look for and things that probably should be in the contract. Just because something is not there does not mean that the contract or the contractor is bad. It does mean that you should be more cautious and sure that you know exactly what will happen. **Above all else, be sure to get a copy of the**

signed contract and keep it in a safe place.

Payments

There are many ways to pay for a home repair project. Be sure that you understand the method that you choose. Some Tips:

1. Try to limit the down payment.
2. Don't make a final payment until the work is done to your satisfaction.
3. Make sure that the subcontractors (if there are any) are getting paid. If they don't get paid by the general contractor and you have not gotten a waiver they might be able to put a "mechanic's lien" on the work until they do.

Warning signs of a Scam or Unqualified Contractor:

- Door-to-door solicitation.
- Failure to provide references when asked.
- Only takes cash. and wants full or significant payment in advance

- Wants payments made to someone other than the owner or the business.
- Has inaccurate or incomplete information about the business.
- Pressures you for decisions about the project.

If you have any questions or think that you might be the victim of fraud, contact the Consumer Protection Bureau of the Attorney General's Office at 1-888-468-4454, or on the web at www.doj.nh.gov/consumer. You may also find information about home repair and what to look out for from the Federal Trade Commission online at <http://www.ftc.gov>.

