

AVOID GETTING RIPPED OFF BY A CONTRACTOR

Tips for finding, vetting and working with contractors from our partners at Erie Insurance

FINDING A CONTRACTOR

- Check in with your local homebuilders' association. You'll be able to search contractors within your area and put together a list of potentials.
- Get referrals. Ask your friends, family and coworkers who they've worked with in the past. They may have a great contractor you haven't heard of — or know of a few you should stay away from.
- Prepare ahead. The stress of an emergency repair might impact your judgment.

VETTING A CONTRACTOR

- Association check. See if the trade association(s) to which they belong stipulates a code of ethics, minimum hours of satisfactory work and trade exams.
- Search for reviews (good or bad). Check in with your state attorney general's office and the Better Business Bureau to see if there are any complaints against the contractor. Glance over their public company reviews on social networks or other trusted review sites.

PAPERWORK TO SEE FROM YOUR CONTRACTOR

- A copy of their contractor's license. Licensing and certification requirements vary by state. Check with your local State Consumer Protection Office to view your area's licensing laws to ensure your contractor is verified and up to date.
- Certificate of insurance. Ask for both general liability, property damage and workers' compensation coverage and make sure they are up to date.
- A written warranty. You'll want a warranty for the work they do, the materials used and their workers.
- A list of references. Have they done a project similar to what you are looking to have done?
- A detailed quote. The quote should outline all material used and labor that is expected to be done.
- The contract. Detailed within the contract should be the cost, work to be done, time schedules, guarantees, payment schedules, building permits and other expectations. (Keep this contract for future reference or if any questions arise after the job is complete).
- A receipt. Make sure to get a receipt that is marked "paid in full" when a job is completed and paid.
- Discuss the need for a lien waiver. This assures you that your general contractor is paying any subcontractors or suppliers they are working with, so you aren't liable for additional costs later on.

AS THE JOB COMES TO A CLOSE

- Keep records. Keep all your paperwork, receipts and change orders (digital copies too!).
- Snap a photo. Map your progress with weekly photos - or save them for a big before and after reveal.
- Write a review. Good or bad, share details of the work they did, how well they stuck to the timeline and what the finished product looked like. This will help others in their search for hiring a contractor too.

Most contractors are trustworthy and are in this line of work for the right reasons. However, some scammers pose as contractors and don't actually have your best interests in mind. Here are some signs that should make you think twice.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION IF...

- The contractor asks you to pay the entire balance up-front.
- The contractor only accepts cash.
- The contractor avoids giving you a written contract.
- A contractor goes door-to-door – or pops up right after a storm.
- The contractor lists a P.O. Box instead of a street address.
- The contractor uses a vehicle that doesn't list the business name.
- A contractor offers to pay your insurance deductible.
- A contractor offers to arrange a loan for you.
- You have little to no experience hiring home contractors.
- You're unable to access the areas of your home that a contractor claims are damaged. Ask a friend or family member or another trusted professional to inspect the area for you.
- You're not 100% clear about the contract wording. It's OK to ask questions or have someone else review the contract with you.

Trust your gut, do your research and use your head when hiring a contractor.

**AND if you have questions about your insurance coverage,
give Blue Marsh a call: 610-590-0152
or visit: www.bluemarsh.com**