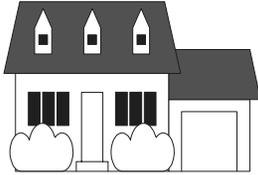


As a homeowner you are aware of the endless possibility of things that can break or go wrong in your house. Often the repairs are too complicated to do yourself, so you will have to hire a professional contractor.

Unfortunately, some corrupt contractors see this as an opportunity to take advantage of senior citizens. This booklet is a guide to help you choose a contractor and to know your rights when entering into a contract for home repairs.



HIRING THE CONTRACTOR

Once you have decided to make repairs to your home, your first step is to hire a contractor to do the work. The first step in hiring a good contractor is to ask people who you trust if they know a reliable contractor. Also, look in the telephone book or newspaper. You should



be suspicious of any "contractor" who comes to your home, or calls you to solicit

work.

GET WRITTEN ESTIMATES

You should have at least three contractors come to your home to give you a *free* estimate of what repairs they will do and the cost of those repairs. Make sure each estimate is clearly written and

specifically details what work will be done, and what materials will be used. The estimate should itemize the cost of each job to be done, and the materials to be used. It should also include the *total* cost of the job. You should walk through the house with the contractor and have him explain what work will be done. Hearing more than one contractor tell you what he intends to do, and how it will be done, should help you choose the contractor that is best for the job. **Remember: the lowest estimate is not always the best.**

CHECK OUT THE CONTRACTORS

Before you hire a contractor, make sure that he has the legally required licenses. A contractor must have a city *business privilege license*, a *contractor license* and a *plumbing or electrical license* if he intends to do that type of work. Call the Department of Licenses and Inspections - License Issuance Unit at 686-2490 to make sure that the contractor has all required licenses. Also, your contractor should have liability insurance for at least \$100,000 to protect you from having to pay if a worker is hurt while working on your home. Ask the contractor for proof of insurance. You should also be aware that the City may require a *construction permit* for the job. Because of lower costs, you may be tempted to hire a contractor who



tells you that licenses, permits, and insurance are not important. It is in your best interest to ignore these contractors.

WHAT TO ASK THE CONTRACTOR

When contractors come to your house you should ask them these questions:

- Does any of the work require hiring a sub-contractor such as an electrician, plumber, or roofer, which will add to the cost?
- When can the work begin and when will it be completed?
- Are any delays in getting material expected?
- What type of guarantee is offered, and for how long?
- What type of payments are required, how much down, how much on completion?

THE CONTRACT

The contract is the most important part of your relationship with the contractor who repairs your home. It sets out each party's responsibilities.



Remember, *you*, as well as the contractor, are bound by the terms of the contract, so it is important to read it carefully.

The following is a list of some of the things that your contract should include:

- The total cost of the job.

- Exact beginning date and estimated ending date.
- A detailed list of all the work to be done and materials to be used.
- A guarantee against defects in workmanship and materials.
- A requirement that the contractor returns and fixes any problems.
- A fair payment plan (i.e. 10% when job is started; payment for work and materials as job progresses; and the final 10% when job is completed to your satisfaction).
- If, during the job, you and the contractor agree to change the contract, then make sure that the changes are put in writing and signed by both.
- A statement that the contractor will get all necessary permits.
- Also, ***never pay in cash***. Always get a receipt.

YOUR RIGHT TO CANCEL

When you sign a contract for goods or services worth at least \$25, as a result of a contact with you or call on you at your home, it should include a statement explaining your right to cancel the contract within 3 full business days following the day on which you signed it. You should also receive a form, in duplicate, explaining that right. You must notify the contractor in writing that you intend to cancel. Be sure to keep a copy of your letter.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

You should keep watch over the work as it progresses. If you have a friend or family member who is familiar with construction practices, have them help you. Pay particular attention to plumbing, electrical, and roofing work, because these types of repairs are often hidden. One of the best ways to protect yourself is to get involved and ask questions.

If problems arise during or after the job, then you should contact the contractor and try to solve them. Remember to keep copies of any letters you send to the contractor. If you are unable to solve the problem on your own, then contact:

Homeowners Assistance Program

SeniorLAW Center
100 S. Broad Street, Suite 1810
Philadelphia, PA 19110
(215) 988-1242



The Home Repair Contract



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A Senior Citizen's Guide to Home Repair Contracts



SeniorLAW Center
 100 S. Broad Street, Suite 1810
 Philadelphia, PA 19110