

## HOW TO TELL THE GOOD GUYS FROM THE BAD

We hear so many home repair complaints about unscrupulous contractors who perform shoddy work or run off with the money and never complete the job. The "News magazines" on television find the worst contractor around to feature and boost their ratings in the process. Unfortunately, honest contractors like us are often hurt by this negative publicity. The emphasis is always on the bad contractor, but the public could and should be more responsible for their remodeling projects. You can protect yourself by doing some common sense things.

**Check on your contractor's reputation and experience.** Ask your friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers. Check with the building inspector (he's the one who checks our work). Ask about us at Brookside Lumber or other places we might do business. Check with the Better Business Bureau - but if there is no report, don't assume all is ok. Check with trade organizations such as the National Kitchen and Bath Association, Builder's Association or Remodeler's Council. If you see us working in your neighborhood, watch our work and see how the job progresses. If the contractor has a place of business, that's even better. If you have a complaint about our work, just call us or come in our front door. You better believe we'll have to deal with it pretty darn quick. The guy who purchased a ladder last week, owns a hammer and today calls himself a contractor will be much harder to track down when there's a problem. He can choose whether to return your calls left on the answering machine. Mistakes can occur on jobs, but getting them straightened out right away is important. We encourage people to stop in our office and find out what we're all about. People who do that gain the trust that is essential for a working relationship. If you don't trust the contractor, don't go any further! Did you look at the truck he drives, his appearance, his tools, his place of business? If they're in terrible shape, what makes you think he's going to have any respect for your property?

**Get a contract in writing with a lot of detail.** No we can't list every single thing, but a contract with signatures for both you and the contractor is essential. The cost has to be on the contract - don't sign if it isn't. The payment schedule should be there if the job is substantial. We charge 20% down on all jobs with progress payments after each segment is completed. You're never paying before something is done, but we do expect a payment of

(for example) \$4000 after all the kitchen cabinets or many replacement windows are delivered to your home. If you're to have a faucet and sink, make sure the contract states what kind and model numbers. We sell Kohler faucets that vary from \$40 to more than \$3000. If I were spending the larger amount, I would want detail!! Make certain comparison bids are using identical specifications. Remember the faucets? My bid may seem high, but the quality of the materials may be superior. Find out. Also remember, if a contractor gave you a price much cheaper than another, he can't always be the cheapest or he will soon be out of business. When he realizes he made a mistake (halfway through your job) where is the incentive to finish the work properly? The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.

**Your contract should include the contractor's insurance information.** If his employee falls off a ladder or down your stairs, drops the tub, breaks the \$3000 faucet or your most treasured possession - you want his insurance to pay. Did you know that all contractors are required to prove they carry workmen's compensation insurance before they can get a building permit? It is a state law to protect you. Not all municipalities have the same requirements for permits but if something is built incorrectly that inspection can protect you. Did you know that in Allegheny County remodelers are required to use a registered plumber and electrician? After the fire, I doubt you would get much compensation from that guy with the hammer and ladder for connecting the wrong wires. If you do your own remodeling, a claim may not be paid if you're not qualified to do that work.

**Pricing:** Our overhead may cost more with a showroom, nice trucks, reliable & responsible employees who wear uniforms and are paid fair wages with benefits. But since we have an area with substantial storage we can buy 1000' of moulded casing cheaper than someone who buys a 12' and 8' piece. We can buy in quantity and store it here; we don't have to run to the lumber yard frequently and be away from your job. Our nice trucks show we know how to take care of things properly. Our uniforms make it safer for you to identify our employees & assures our suppliers that they are approved to purchase on our accounts. Our workers remain loyal, continue their training and you come to rely on them from one job to the next.

The last area of concern for us is something that the television reporters & magazines tell you to do - but we somewhat disagree. They tell you to contact people who the contractor has worked for previously. We agree if the people know you. Our customers do not owe us their time after we've completed their job. We hesitate to hand out their names and try to protect their privacy. Use the ways mentioned earlier to find out about us. We do a good job for our customers at a fair price. We leave each job hoping that we can work for that person again, or their friends or relatives. That is how we get most of our work. When my phone rings after a long, hard day at work and after the 2<sup>nd</sup> telemarketing call, I do not want to tell Mrs. Jones about my remodeling experience. I don't want her coming to my home, knocking on my door. I don't want to show her my new but slightly unkempt bathroom. I want to enjoy my family, have an uninterrupted meal & do some pleasurable things.

Until the state of Pennsylvania requires all contractors to be licensed, there will be unscrupulous folks out there ready to take your money and produce shoddy work. Remodeling can be stressful. There are fears of being ripped off, fear of expense, fear of disappointment and disruption. Your home is the biggest investment for most people. You need to put your job in the hands of an expert to protect yourself. As in any business, you only get what you pay for. You decide who you want to do your work!

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