

HBA warns consumers about unreliable contractors

With so many homeowners facing flood damage and needing contractors to help rebuild, construction companies are springing up out of nowhere, making it hard to distinguish the reputable contractors. The Bismarck-Mandan Home Builders Association (BMHBA) reminds residents of the benefits of using a local, licensed contractor. In general, qualified contractors have a history of working in the area, have built up a list of references, and will be around to service warranties and problems that may arise with projects.

To determine if you are working with a qualified contractor:

1. Always check if the contractor is licensed in North Dakota. This can be done by visiting the N.D. Secretary of State's Web site at <http://nd.gov/sos/licensing/> or by calling the licensing division at (701) 328-3665.
2. Always ask for references and verify them.
3. Ask the contractor how long and where he or she has been in business.
4. Ask for a local business address, other than a post office box, and a local phone number where the contractor can be reached during normal business hours. Some transient companies will open a post office box or get a cell phone with a local number to give the appearance of being a local company when they are not.
5. Ask about warranty work and the company's service policies.
6. Insist on a complete and clearly written contract including a summary of the work to be done, description of materials, total contract price or how the price will be calculated and specific timelines.
7. Get more than one estimate and be wary of any contractor that requires full payment up front, uses high-pressure sales tactics or says a discount is only available if a contract is signed at that time. Consider paying with credit card since they have better methods of remedying disputes and dealing with fraudulent charges.
8. Find out if the contractor has sufficient workers compensation and general liability insurance. If not, you may be liable for any construction-related accidents on your premises.

"With the extreme weather conditions and all the media attention, it is more important than ever for consumers to know who they are working with," urges Roxy Jacobson, executive officer of the BMHBA. "Our community has already dealt with one disaster — this flood — but hopefully we can prevent another from happening — unreliable contractors who take advantage of our situation."

For more information visit www.mbhba.com or contact the BMHBA at (701) 222-2400.

Mor-Gran-Sou Electric thanks the Bismarck-Mandan Home Builders Association for sharing this contractor checklist.

Warning signs of an unscrupulous contractor

- You're told that on this job, a contract won't be necessary.
- You're asked to pay for the entire job up front, or pay cash to a salesperson instead of check or money order to a company.
- You are confronted with scare tactics.
- You're told you've been chosen as a demonstration project at a special, low price.
- You're told a low price is good only if you sign a contract today.
- The contractor won't give you references, or the references can't be located.
- You can't verify the contractor's business address.