

✓ Construction Project Check-List

- Find out from your local building department if your project needs a building permit, and confirm that your contractor will obtain all necessary permits.
- Get at least three identical construction bids and ask for client references.
- Ask to see the contractor's pocket license and a current photo ID—the names need to match.
- Consider searching the contractor's name online for additional reviews.
- Check the contractor license number to make sure it is current and in good standing at www.cslb.ca.gov or by calling 800-321-CSLB (2752).
- Ask for a current list of contact information (telephone number and business address) for the contractor, subcontractors, and suppliers.
- Ask if your contractor carries general liability insurance in case of accidental damage and workers' compensation insurance for employees.
- Make sure you get a detailed written contract before work begins. The contract should include specifics about project materials and expectations, as well as clean-up and debris removal. Do not sign a contract you do not understand.
- Have a timetable for each phase of your project and the corresponding payment schedule spelled out in the contract. Do not let payments get ahead of the work.
- Pay no more than 10% of the total contract price or \$1,000 as a down payment, whichever is less. * Avoid paying in cash.
- Keep all of your project documents, including payments and photographs, in a job file.

* There is an exception to this rule for about two dozen contractors who have filed a blanket performance and payment bond with the Registrar. This information is noted on the contractor's license detail page on CSLB's website.

General Tips

If the contractor asks you to sign the contract on an electronic device (iPad, tablet, laptop computer), request an immediate paper copy. Otherwise, you may not receive a copy of the contract, or some of the contract language may change between the time you signed and when you receive a copy.

Be aware that those 65 or older have a five business day right to cancel a home improvement contract. For all others, there is a three-business day right to cancel. Do not allow the contractor to begin work or pull permits during this three-day period. Also, resist any pressure to waive your three-day right to cancel.

Be wary of contractor-endorsed financing. The interest rate may be higher than that of a financial institution, and the length of the loan may be longer than necessary.

WHAT SENIORS SHOULD KNOW Before Hiring A Contractor



**CONTRACTORS STATE
LICENSE BOARD**

Department of Consumer Affairs



CONTRACTORS STATE LICENSE BOARD

P.O. Box 26000
Sacramento, CA 95826-0026
800.321.CSLB (2752)
www.cslb.ca.gov • CheckTheLicenseFirst.com

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

13P-066/0121



WHAT SENIORS SHOULD KNOW

Before Hiring A Contractor

- Have a clear idea of the work you want and the finished project before you call in the professionals. Find the best contractor for your construction project by taking a few easy steps before you get started—it'll save you a bundle in unexpected expenses, time, and stress.



- Anyone performing home improvement work valued at \$500 or more (combined labor and material costs) must be licensed by the Contractors State License Board (CSLB). CSLB-licensed contractors have passed trade and contractor license law exams, and, since 2005, have undergone a criminal background investigation.
- Whether you search the telephone directory, print or online advertisements, or get recommendations from friends or neighbors, your first step is to ask the contractor for his or her state contractor license number. Verify that the number is active and in good standing by checking online at www.cslb.ca.gov, or by calling 800-321-CSLB (2752).
- CSLB also provides information about the contractor's bond, workers' compensation insurance status, and any pending or prior disciplinary actions.
- Any home improvement salesperson that comes to your door must be registered with CSLB. Ask to see his or her registration card.

What Seniors Should Know About Common Contractor Scams

- **Door-to-Door Solicitations**

A solicitor may offer to do roofing, painting, or paving work with "leftover" materials at a "reduced" or significantly discounted price. Once payment is made, little or no work is done and the project is abandoned.

- **High Pressure Sales**

A fast-talking operator pushes you for an immediate decision about work, which makes it impossible for you to get the recommended three competitive bids, check licenses, building permit requirements, or review references.

- **Scare Tactics**

A person offers to perform a free inspection, then claims that a serious problem such as faulty wiring, bad plumbing, or a leaky roof, will put you in danger. This can lead to unnecessary and over-priced work.

- **Verbal Agreements**

The "contractor" states that a written contract is unnecessary and then does shoddy work—or none at all. It is difficult to prove what was agreed to without a written contract.

- **Demand for Cash**

The worker insists that you pay in cash, sometimes going so far as to drive you to the bank to withdraw funds. With money in hand, the person abandons a substandard or unfinished project.

- **Illegally Large Down Payments**

A contractor takes more for a down payment than is allowed by law, claiming to need instant cash for supplies or to pay workers. By law, a down payment cannot exceed 10% of the total project price or \$1,000, whichever is less.*

