

Do Your Homework Before Hiring

Follow these tips to find a credible contractor who can do a good job without taking you to the cleaners.

- **Ask Around.** Word-of-mouth reference is one of the best ways to find a good fix-it person or contractor.
- **Get Good Phone Numbers.** Think twice about accepting only a cell phone as a point of contact. Ask for a landline telephone number.
- **Get Physical Address.** Get the physical address of the business. Drive by to make sure it is the contractor's actual place of business.
- **Interview Several Contractors.** Talk to at least three contractors and get their *written* bids. Stick to the same project details for each contractor so you have comparable costs to evaluate.
- **Ask For References.** Look at several jobs each contractor has done for other customers. Ask these customers about the contractor's reliability, cost overruns and timeliness.
- **Verify Contractor.** Get a copy of their contractor's license and insurance company contact information. Contact their insurance company and ask them to fax or e-mail you proof of insurance and worker's compensation.
- **Ask Questions.** Does the contractor offer a warranty and how does it work? How does the contractor handle disputes? Does he have more than one job going at a time? Who runs the show when the contractor is not around? Can you meet that person?
- **Check Their Tools and Truck.** Neater is better. An organized truck can be evidence of how a contractor operates on the job.