

How to Hire a Reputable Contractor

Your local builders association is a nonprofit association representing the residential construction industry in your area. In conjunction with 40 other local associations around the state, they comprise the Pennsylvania Builders Association.

Together, the 41 local associations have more than 11,000 employer businesses working to assure you of high quality and up-to-date workmanship for your new home or remodeling project. These businesses believe their first responsibility is to provide safe, decent and affordable housing for all Pennsylvanians. These businesses strive to incorporate high standards of health, safety and good sound design in all homes and are proud of their relationship with the builders association.

Hire a professional builder who is a member of the builders association.

If you are ready to build a new home or remodel an existing one, you are probably wondering what to look for in a responsible builder.

Here are some tips on how to choose a builder or remodeler:

- Call your local builders association for a list of its members. If you need a phone number for your local builders association check your telephone book or call the PBA at (800) 692-7339.
- Ask if the contractor is a member of a builders association.
- Take your time. Most problems occur when consumers fail to investigate contractors carefully before hiring them.
- Ask for an insurance certificate to verify current workers' compensation and general liability insurance.
- Ask for references. Talk with others who have had work done by the contractor about the company's capabilities and quality of workmanship.
- Make sure the contractor has a permanent business location and a good reputation with local banks and suppliers.
- Incorporate any warranties, guarantees or other promises in your written contract. Always insist on a written contract and written change orders.
- Be specific about starting and completion dates. Some delays are unavoidable and beyond the contractor's control.
- Beware of an unusually low bid or low advertised price. If a contractor cannot pay for labor, materials and overhead, you are both in trouble.
- Select a contractor you are comfortable with--one who understands your tastes and needs and with whom you can communicate easily.

Beware of these warning signs of possible trouble ahead when selecting a contractor:

- You cannot verify the name, address and telephone number or credentials of the contractor.
- The salesperson tries to "high pressure" you into signing a contract by using scare tactics, threats or intimidation.
- Although reputable builders sometimes offer special discounts for advertising purposes, watch out for contractors who offer unusually low prices in exchange for advertising. Protect yourself by asking the contractor for a list of previous clients who also had been offered the special rate in exchange for advertising considerations.
- Call the references and ask them if they received the promised quality workmanship and special rate.
- The contractor does not comply with your request for references or the references have some reservation about the contractor.
- You are unable to verify that the contractor is insured.