

## **2020 Guide to hiring a residential building contractor**

As we enter the winter months many residential construction projects slow down or stop. When this happens, it gives people the opportunity to plan for their next project. One important part to think about is who to hire for your construction project.

For most remodeling projects, it is recommended that the person doing the work should get the permit. If a homeowner gets the permit but hires a contractor to do the work, the homeowner is at risk if the contractor does not complete the work according to minimum code requirements. In this situation homeowners are often left on their own to deal with the contractor in a civil case.

If, however, a licensed contractor got the permit and the homeowner had the same type of problems, the homeowner may be able to receive some assistance from the Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) to recover monetary losses and or initiate a formal complaint against the contractor which may result in disciplinary action by the state.

Fortunately, most contractors are reputable and do a good job, but unscrupulous contractors do exist. To help avoid problems, homeowners should still exercise prudence before hiring anyone. The Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry has valuable information to use as a guide when hiring a residential building contractor.

Before hiring a contractor, the DLI suggests that homeowners ask:

1. For the contractor's license number. To verify online if the license is current go to: <https://secure.doli.state.mn.us/lookup/licensing.aspx> or call 651-284-5069.
2. How long the contractor has been in business.
3. Does the contractor have experience with your type of project.
4. For references to ask former customers about work quality or complaints.
5. For a local phone number to check if the contractor is accessible during normal business hours.

The following are indications that a contractor may not be reliable.

1. Arrives in an unmarked vehicle;
2. Offers to complete your job at an unusually low price;
3. Requires full or substantial payment before beginning work;
4. Refuses to provide a written estimate or contract;
5. Refuses to provide a DLI license number;
6. Refuses to provide references;
7. Shows up unsolicited;
8. Uses high-pressure sales tactics;
9. Asks the homeowner to obtain permits for the job.

Obtain at least three detailed bids for any construction or major remodeling project. The bids should be in writing detailing the scope of the work, type of materials and total cost. An approximate completion date should also be included.