



# Disaster Scams

## Before You Hire a Contractor

**Buyer Beware** When selecting a contractor, it's important to use caution, whether you are considering hiring a contractor for home improvement, remodeling, or new construction, make sure the contractor you hire is licensed, insured, and reputable. You can check on line reviews and licensing boards for any past issues.

The most frequent problems heard from consumers involve cost overruns, missed deadlines, and poor workmanship. Other complaints involve unscrupulous contractors who take advance payments and then disappear before finishing or even starting work.

Depending on the type of the project, Texas law requires some contractors to be licensed. To protect yourself, always check to see if the contractor is licensed and in good standing (A/C and Heating, Electricians, and Plumbers, Etc.).

**The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation** regulates a number of trades in the state of Texas and can be researched at: 1-800-803-9202 or <http://www.license.state.tx.us/>

[Air Conditioning and Refrigeration](#)

[Electricians](#)

[Architectural Barriers](#)

**The Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners** regulates plumbing contractors and can be reached at: (800) 845-6584 or <http://www.tsbpe.state.tx.us/index.html>

**Get It in Writing** A written contract, spelling out all the details, should always be used, even on small projects. Avoid contractors who refuse to put it in writing. Keep in mind, any promises that the contractor makes will be difficult to enforce unless they are in writing.

The contract should contain the full name, street address and phone number of the contractor as well as the home owner. It should also have an agreed upon price, complete description of the work to be done, and materials (grades and type) to be used, the starting and completion dates, clean up after the work is finished and the payment schedule. Never sign a contract with blanks to be filled in later.

**Never pay a remodeler or contractor the entire cost of the work up front.** On remodeling projects, never pay more than one-third down. Never release the final payment until the project is completed according to the contract. You should also have proof that all suppliers, employees and subcontractors *have* been paid by the contractor. Remember that changes cost money and time, especially if you decide to make changes after the work begins. To *avoid* misunderstandings, make sure that your agreement with the contractor, concerning both the changes and costs, are put in writing and added to the original contract.

Even if you follow these guidelines, problems may arise. *Ask to see a copy of the company's license or the pocket card issued to all licensed contractors by the State of Texas.* Take time to talk with your contractor about your project and try to work out any disagreements. Frequently, effective communication will resolve most difficulties. If problems persist, it is a good idea to document your side of the dispute by putting in writing all issues that need to be resolved. Send a copy to the contractor and keep a copy for your file.

Additional Information and help can be found at [The Attorney General of Texas](#) : 1-800-252-8011