

Don't Get Scammed: Find A Qualified Contractor

There are thousands of legitimate, ethical contractors in business throughout Spokane. Unfortunately, there are also scam artists looking to cheat you out of your money who pose as legitimate contractors. These “fly-by-night” operators often show up in communities impacted by wildfires to try to scam distressed homeowners into paying for shoddy repairs or work that they will never show up to perform.

Here are some warning signs to look out for:

- **Doesn't have a license or insurance.** All professional contractors in Washington need to be licensed and insured. Contractors should be able to show their certificate proving such insurance.
- **Asks you to sign anything before you've hired them.** If they want you to sign an “estimate” or “authorization” before you've decided to hire the contractor, look out. They may be trying to get you to sign what is an actual binding contract.
- **Doesn't write contracts.** Professionals have clear contracts that outline the job, process, and cost, and help clarify how problems will be managed. If you don't have a contract, you are not protected when something goes wrong. Don't hire anyone who tells you a contract “won't be necessary.”
- **Requires cash or payment in full before starting the job.** Shady contractors demand cash and then run with the money. Many homeowners have been stranded by paying in full up front. A deposit towards materials is common, but only pay it once you have a contract signed by both you and the contractor. It's also suspicious if you're asked to pay cash to a salesperson instead of a check or money order to a company.
- **Vastly underbids all other contractors.** They may have the best price, but that doesn't guarantee the best work. Such contractors may cut costs on quality, which can end up costing you more when you have to have the substandard work redone.
- **Offers “special” pricing.** If you're told you've been “chosen” as a demonstration project at a special, low price, or you're told a low price is good only if you sign a contract today.
- **Cannot provide customer references.** Professional contractors should have current references they can provide from current and past clients — and you should be able to reach those references, not just an answering machine.



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- **Difficulty contacting the contractor.** Professionals have a physical office, mailing address, phone, and email. They should respond to your queries in a timely manner. Make sure you can verify the contractor's business address. If they only have a p.o. box, be wary.
- **Tells you to obtain the building or remodeling permits.** Professional contractors go to the county or state offices and get permits for their work themselves. Asking the home owner to do it is a sign that they are not a legitimate contractor.

Your best bet is to take your time, do your research, and choose someone you feel completely comfortable with. Contact the Spokane Home Builders Association at www.shba.com for more information and to be connected to local home builders and contractors in your area.

