

Michigan Department of  
Attorney General

# consumer education



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Michigan Attorney General

## HOME REPAIR & IMPROVEMENT

Home ownership comes with maintenance, repair, and improvement projects in all different shapes and sizes. Rushing projects or not doing a thorough search for contractors may lead to decisions that could have long term and expensive consequences.

It's important to **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**

### home repair scam warning signs

Beware of out- of-towners coming to your door to do work on your home - no matter how anxious you are to have the work done.

They may want to work on your yard, roof, chimney, or paint your home. Pay attention if a solicitor uses any of the following tactics:

- Creates a false sense of urgency by talking too fast;
- Says the offer is good for one day only;
- Pressures you for an immediate decision;
- Only accepts cash; or
- Suggests you borrow money from a lender they know.

### avoid & report scammers

- Deal with local businesses;
- Check credentials;
- Don't allow solicitors inside your home;
- Don't pay in advance or with cash;
- Write down names and description of transient work crew;
- Write down vehicle descriptions and license plate numbers;
- Contact your local law enforcement agency; and
- Tell your neighbors and family about the incident.



DO YOUR HOMEWORK 1

# home improvement loan

Keep an eye out for contractors who pitch repairs that exceed your budget, only to turn around and offer you a loan through a lender they know.

Be cautious if you're rushed to sign numerous papers without being able to read the documents.



## experts recommend:

- Determine if the repair is vital;
- Check with your bank or credit union about other loan options (i.e. home equity loan); and
- Do not be pressured into signing a loan agreement.



## KEEP CALM AND DO YOUR HOMEWORK

- Search for contractors
- Interview contractors
- Get everything in writing
- Pay over the duration of the project.

## finding a contractor

Before you begin a project, determine exactly what you want to have done. And then, familiarize yourself with the different types of contractors.



1. **General contractor** - manages all aspects of a project.
2. **Specialty contractor** - installs specific products (i.e. cabinets or bathroom fixtures).

### Worried about mold?

[Learn all you need to know at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Service's All About Mold resource page.](#)

## verify a license with lara

[Verify a Residential Builder or Materials & Alterations Contractor's License.](#)

517-373-8068

[Verify a Mechanical, Plumbing, or Electrical Contractor's License.](#)

517-241-9316

# ask questions

1. What is your license number?
2. How long have you been in business?
3. How many projects like mine have you completed in the last year?
4. Does the work require a permit?
5. Will you use subcontractors?
6. Do you carry liability insurance?
7. Can you provide a written estimate and references?
8. Will the project cost more than \$600? If so, it will require a license.



## contract

1. Get guarantees in writing.
2. Include the contractor's address, phone number, and license number.
3. List start and completion dates.
4. Include a breakdown of costs and payment due dates.
5. List materials to be used, including brand, model, size, color, and patterns.
6. Review contract cancellation terms.
7. Determine who is responsible for permits and clean-up.



## complaints

### Complaints Against Licensed Contractors

[File a complaint against a licensed Residential Builder or a licensed Material & Alterations Contractor](#) with the Bureau of Professional Licensing.

517-373-9196

You can file a complaint against a licensed Mechanic, Plumbing, or Electrical contractor with the Bureau of Construction Codes by phone: 517-241-9309, [or by email](#) (lara-bcc-complaints@michigan.gov)

### Complaints Against Unlicensed Contractors

Michigan Department of Attorney General  
Consumer Protection Division  
P.O. Box 30213  
Lansing, MI 48909  
517-373-1140  
[Online complaint form](#)  
(mi.gov/agcomplaints)

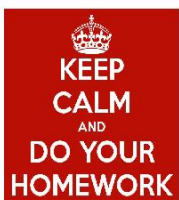
# payment terms

- Deposits should not be more than 1/3 of the total project cost.
- Schedule payments as work progresses.
- Do not make payments in cash.
- Make your final payment when the job is finished to your satisfaction and you have proof that all subcontractors and supplies have been paid.



## resolving disputes

- Try to resolve the dispute directly with the contractor before making the final payment.
- Contact the local building inspector for assistance in resolving workmanship and code violations.
- If the contractor is not licensed and is required to be, contact your local law enforcement.
- File a written complaint with the appropriate agency (LARA or the Michigan Department of Attorney General - Consumer Protection Division).
- [File a complaint with the Better Business Bureau](#) (BBB). 616-774-8236 or 248-223-9400



Time invested in doing your homework **before** a home repair project is a valuable investment for you and your family.

An [electronic copy of this handout](#) is available through the QR code below or on our website ([mi.gov/ce](http://mi.gov/ce)). While you're there, [schedule a presentation](#) ([mi.gov/ce](http://mi.gov/ce)) for one of our other seminars.

For questions, [contact Attorney General Bill Schuette's Consumer Programs team](#) at 877-765-8388 or [agcp@mi.gov](mailto:agcp@mi.gov).

