

Before You Start

Three most important words:

References, References, References

Always call a licensed, insured professional. An established company with a good reputation is a successful formula for a quality job.

Rule of thumb: If you don't receive a return call by the third attempt, it is time to call someone else.

Ask the contractor for the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of the last five jobs he or she has completed. It is important to call at least three references.

Put your job specifications and plans in writing to make sure you have communicated the details of the project to all prospective contractors.

Hire the contractor most qualified to do the work. Don't focus on price alone. Extremely inexpensive contractors have the highest rate of failure.

Ask for proposals in writing, along with a detailed job description, special materials, and payment requirements. Upon acceptance of the proposal, both parties should sign a completed contract.

Request a copy of the Contractor's Liability and Worker's Compensation Insurance before the job is started.

State law allows a maximum of 1/3 deposit, except for the cost of any special order items.

During the Job

The greatest need after the job starts is good communication.

Make sure that your project is properly permitted and that all contractors on the job site are licensed and insured.

Establish means of communicating with your contractor, i.e., fax, cell and business phone numbers, and email address, as well as a contact person.

Make sure the contractor has addressed job details, i.e., obtaining all necessary permits, rubbish removal, phone use, parking, toilet, etc., before any work starts.

Set up a reasonable time schedule and, if timely completion is critical, include a penalty clause in the contract.

Check that the materials are neatly stored and the job site is clean in order to assure job safety.

Inspect the work before making progress payments.

Write down any change requests, issues or problems to prevent miscommunication.

It is fraudulent for a contractor to bill a client for a state-licensed tradesperson if the tradesperson is not licensed.

Before Final Payment

The three most common complaints are:

- 1 - Job abandonment
- 2 - Shoddy workmanship
- 3 - Outright fraud

Request a meeting with the contractor to discuss "punch list" items necessary for completion.

If the contractor does not respond to problems, send a certified letter to his or her business address.

Never make final payment unless the job is complete to the specifications of the contract. Make sure you get what you pay for.

Finally, if the contractor did not complete the job or respond to problems, contact the authorities listed below.

Attorney General:

617-727-8400, www.mass.gov/homeimprovement

Gloucester Building Inspector:

978-281-9774, www.ci.gloucester.ma.us

Rockport Building Inspector:

978-546-9218, www.town.rockport.ma.us

Manchester Building Inspector:

978-526-2000, www.manchester.ma.us

Essex Building Inspector:

978-768-2514, www.essexma.org

Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce

978-283-1601, www.capeannchamber.com