

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Sprucing up the House

The spring flowers and warm spring weather of the past few days give welcome signs that another winter is past. Winter may be gone, but it left behind signs of its New England visit for every homeowner to see.

The signs may show up as peeling paint, cracked driveway or a weather-damaged deck. Or the new season may simply inspire you to spruce up the homestead. Whatever the source of the need, this is the season for many homeowners to call contractors to make improvements to our homes.

Home improvement contractors generally perform their work professionally and satisfactorily, though it is always good to have a guarantee of performance. The state has established the Home Improvement Contractor (HIC) Law to help consumers secure the satisfactory completion of contracted work.

The law was passed in 1992, and it is a good guarantee of performance. It established a contractor registration requirement, an arbitration program for resolving disputes between homeowners and registered contractors and a Guaranty Fund to compensate consumers up to \$10,000 for unpaid judgments against registered home improvement contractors. You will have these protections so long as you as the consumer follow these guidelines.

First, be sure that your contractor is registered with the Board of Building Registration and Standards (BBRS). The law offers no recourse against an unregistered contractor. You may check such registration on the contractor listing at <http://bd.state.ma.us/bbrs/hic.pl>. Or you can contact BBRS directly at 617-727-3200. If you do not want to make the long-distance call, call my office, 567-1661, and I will check on the registration for you.

Second, you must have a written contract for the job. All home improvement contracts over \$1,000 in value must be in writing, and lower value contracts need to be in writing in order to qualify for arbitration and the Guarantee Fund.

Third, the contract must include these items:

- The complete agreement along with any supplemental information.
- The full name, federal ID number and address of the contractor.
- The dates for start and substantial completion of the project.
- The agreed amount to be paid and schedule for payments.
- The statement, “do not sign this contract if there are any blank spaces.”
- A notice of arbitration rights in the event of a dispute.
- A 3-day cancellation notice.

Lastly, the contractor must have secured the building permit (with some exceptions), and the work must be on your primary residence.

The state Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation has published a brochure outlining the specifics of the HIC program for your reference. Please call my office, 567-1661, or send an e-mail to mary@rogeness.com if you would like a copy.

Making those long-anticipated improvements to your home should be a pleasant experience. The legislature enacted this law to help make that hope a reality. By following the guidelines listed here, you can do your part to begin this summer with a no-hassle upgrade to your home.