



## After a Disaster: Hiring a Contractor



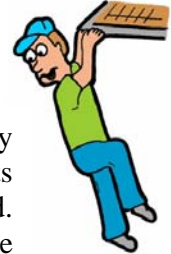
If your house has been damaged by a natural disaster — wind, fire, flood or earthquake — a reputable contractor can help you get your home repaired. Unfortunately, disasters sometimes bring out home repair rip-off artists, who overcharge, perform shoddy work, and often leave without finishing the job. What can you do to find a quality contractor?

χ Be wary of builders or contractors who go door-to-door selling their services, especially those who are not known in your community or offer reduced prices because they have just completed work nearby and claim they have materials left over.

χ Be skeptical of contractors who encourage you to spend a lot of money on temporary repairs. Make sure you will have enough money to complete permanent repairs.

χ Ask friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, insurance agents or claims adjusters for recommendations. Also check with your Better Business Bureau and Building Inspector to see if complaints have been lodged against any contractor you are considering.

χ **Deal only with licensed and insured contractors.** Investigate the track record of any roofer, builder or contractor you are thinking of hiring. Make sure your contractor gets applicable permits and inspections from your local government for the work performed. ***Beware of contractors who ask you to obtain the permits for them.*** Be sure the contractor has worker's compensation insurance. Contact your local Building Inspector (*telephone numbers in the blue pages of phone book*) to verify if a contractor is licensed.



χ Do not let anyone rush you into signing a contract. Get written estimates from at least three firms. Ask contractors if there is a charge for an estimate before allowing them in your home. Compare your insurance settlements to any estimates from contractors to minimize your out-of-pocket expenses. Ask for explanations of price variations. Do not automatically choose the lowest bidder.

χ Have a knowledgeable friend, relative, or your attorney review a contract before you sign. If you get a loan to pay for the work, consider having these documents reviewed as well. Get a copy of the final, signed contract. Be careful about add-ons to contracts, as these generally increase your costs.

χ Be cautious about using your home as security for a home improvement loan. If you fail to repay the loan as agreed, you could lose your home.



χ Beware of contractors who ask you to pay for the entire job up-front. Never give a deposit until you have done your homework. Making down payments should be avoided, if possible. If you make a down payment, it should not be more than one-third of the total price. Pay only by check or credit card, and pay the final amount only after the work is completed to your satisfaction and has been inspected by the Building Inspector.  
**Do not pay cash.**

***If you suspect a repair rip-off, call the SC Department of Consumer Affairs (800-922-1594). If you suspect fraud, waste, or abuse involving Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance programs, you can make a confidential report to FEMA's Inspector General's Office.***