



Rebuilding Healthy Homes: Choosing a Contractor

Where can I find qualified contractors?

- Check your state's contractor licensing agency for lists of licensed or registered general and specialty contractors. In Alaska, search for professional licenses on the state's licensing website at <http://bit.ly/2BRsiql>.
- Find certified Lead-Safe Renovators in your area at www.epa.gov/lead.
- Find a link to the agency in your state that lists asbestos professionals at www.epa.gov/asbestos (see Hire an Asbestos Professional), visit www.nachi.org/asbestos, or contact your local Health Department. For accredited asbestos laboratories, visit www.nist.gov and select the Laboratory Accreditation (NVLAP) link under Products and Services.
- Check restoration industry groups that list professionals certified in cleaning, fire and water damage, mold remediation and related specialties, such as:
 - The Restoration Industry Association (www.restorationindustry.org)
 - The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (www.certifiedcleaners.org)
 - The American Council for Accredited Certification (www.acac.org).
- To find home builders and remodelers who are members of the Alaska State Homebuilding Association and its local chapters, visit <https://buildersofalaska.com>. Members are licensed, bonded and insured.
- Check with your insurance company, licensed home inspector or building official for referrals.



What should I look for or require from a contractor?

- Many, but not all, states require contractors to be licensed, bonded, registered and/or certified. Check with your local building permit office or consumer protection agency to find out local requirements. Verify by checking online or calling the authorizing agency.
- Lead-Safe Certified Renovators have an EPA photo certificate and are listed on the EPA website (www.epa.gov/lead).
- Look at websites you trust that post contractor reviews for insights, but keep in mind that extreme comments may be unreliable. You can also check a contractor's online reputation by searching the company name with words like "scam," "rip-off" or "complaint."
- Check the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org) for records of complaints about local firms. Check with your state's attorney general's office or designated agency for complaints against contractors. The Alaska Consumer Protection Unit can be reached at 888-576-2529.
- Try to interview three or more contractors to compare and evaluate their suggested approaches, materials and expertise. If you can get multiple quotes, use the same scope of work and materials for each estimate.

- Ask each contractor to provide at least three references on similar jobs.
- Ask contractors for proof of current insurance (a Certificate of Insurance), showing liability, worker’s compensation and property damage coverage.
- Once you select a contractor, get a written contract that clearly states:
 - The contractor’s obligation to get all required permits, and to maintain insurance
 - A detailed scope of work, list of materials, plan for protection during work, and who is responsible for site cleanup and debris disposal
 - The estimated start and completion dates
 - Total cost and schedule of payments (Limit your down payment, and tie payments to completion of defined stages of work.)
 - A requirement for copies of vendor receipts or a lien waiver (to prevent vendors the contractor has not paid from seeking payment from you, after you’ve already paid the contractor)
 - An agreement to withhold final payment until completion and satisfactory inspection
 - Warranties covering workmanship and materials.
- Following completion of regulatory work or decontamination jobs (such as mold, lead or asbestos remediation), get a clearance certificate or report.

What should I avoid when hiring a contractor?

- Avoid door-to-door solicitors who offer restoration work. They are especially common after disasters.
- Avoid contractors who push for a quick decision, making it impossible for you to get competitive bids, check licenses, and review references.
- Do not hire unlicensed or uninsured contractors. Do not hire contractors who claim to be operating under another firm’s license or certification, or whose license is from a different state. Check the date of a contractor’s license to make sure it has not expired.
- Get a written agreement, not just a verbal agreement. Do not sign an agreement or anything else until you have read and clearly understand all the terms.
- Find out about local laws or regulations on contracting for home repairs. Some states have a “right of rescission,” often known as a buyer’s remorse rule, that allows a set period of time (Alaska is 5 days) in which you can cancel a contract you signed in your home.
- It’s best to avoid making up-front payments to a contractor before work begins. If down payments are customary in your area, don’t pay more than 10% or \$1,000, whichever is less, of the total cost before work begins. Do not let the payment schedule get ahead of work completed. Do not pay for materials without copies of receipts or a lien waiver.
- Do not make the final payment until you are satisfied with the job.
- Never pay cash. Keep a record of all payments.
- Do not hire contractors who recommend fogging or spraying as the method to clean up mold.

This publication is adapted with permission from “Rebuild Healthy Homes,” a publication of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



Download the FREE Rebuild Healthy Homes app! This app has information for restoring homes after a natural disaster, including the principles and technical aspects of the safe and proper removal of mold, radon, asbestos, lead, and other hazards. Available on the App Store for iOS devices: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/rebuild-healthy-homes/id980660616?mt=8>