

National Consumer Protection Week: Handy Tips for Home Improvement Planning

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It's National Consumer Protection Week! The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) recognizes this annual campaign as a way to teach people about their consumer rights and to give them the tools they need to protect themselves from scams.

This week, DATCP will look at the top five consumer complaints from 2016, providing insight into the nature of the complaints and safety tips to follow throughout 2017.

Consumer Protection Week, Day Five: Home Improvement

Spring is only ten days away, and with the season comes the risk of damaging storms and the excitement of home renovation projects coming off of hold from the winter.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) received 383 home improvement complaints in 2016, ranking the category fifth among all issues. What can property owners do to limit the potential for home improvement disputes in 2017? Whether you are looking to patch up from a major storm or have your heart set on a renovation project, the guidance remains the same: know your rights, do your research and evaluate your options **BEFORE** the time comes to hire a contractor.

DATCP Tips Sheet: Every homeowner should download a free copy of DATCP's home improvement consumer tips sheet. This sheet includes information on hiring contractors, Wisconsin's "Right to Cure" law, a consumer's right to cancel a job, and more.

Plan ahead: The best way to ensure that you find a quality contractor for your needs is to start your research well in advance of a project. Seek referrals from friends, family and neighbors. Conduct online research on the businesses you are considering and contact DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline (1-800-422-7128) to inquire about complaints.

Get competitive bids: Always seek multiple bids with trusted local contractors (even in the aftermath of a storm), and ask them for references from recent jobs. Make sure the contractor comes to the job site rather than giving a telephone estimate. Be leery of an extremely low estimate and remember to ask about timing for the project and the number of workers who will be assigned to the job.

Get lien waivers: Always ask for a lien waiver from your contractor when you make a payment. Lien waivers protect the homeowner from having a lien put on their home in the off-chance that the contractor does not pay material suppliers and subcontractors. A home improvement contractor must, by law, give a buyer a "Notice of Consumer's Right to Receive Lien Waivers" document before the parties enter into a contract, and the contractor must provide lien waivers if you request them.

For additional information, get a copy of the factsheet or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcpHotline@wisconsin.gov.

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