

HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

Planning A Home Improvement Project? Don't Be The Victim Of A Scam

(NAPSA)—Almost every homeowner has dreams of making a house more beautiful or functional. A room addition, new siding, new windows or a pool can make a home more livable, and increase its value as well.

The thought of dealing with home improvement contractors, however, fills many homeowners with dread. It seems everyone has heard a story about a contractor who took money and didn't finish the job, or presented a final bill that was well above the initial estimate.

One potential ally that consumers may overlook is a home improvement financing company. If you pay cash or use a line of credit for home improvements, you can lose a lot of leverage with a contractor. When the financing for a project is handled by a lender that specializes in home improvements, homeowners can maintain more control over the project, leading to greater peace of mind.

Conseco Finance works with hundreds of contractors across the country. Each contractor must meet strict minimum requirements to become a Conseco Finance dealer, including time in business and satisfactory standing with state and local licensing authorities.

"We screen the dealers we do business with very carefully, and they are monitored on an ongoing basis," said Jeff Surratt, senior vice president of Conseco Finance's Home Improvement Division. "We demand that our customers be happy with the work done on their homes."

The nation's number one provider of home improvement financing suggests that consumers take the following steps to keep their home improvement project running smoothly.

1) Choose an experienced contractor. "Your lender should be able to provide you with names of contractors who have been in business a long time and have large numbers of satisfied customers," Surratt said.



2) Check references. Qualified contractors are usually happy to give you names of homeowners in your area. Call several, and ask a number of questions about promptness, workmanship and materials.

3) Check licensing and insurance coverage. A home improvement lender should ensure that the contractor meets all licensing requirements, and has adequate insurance coverage in case of accidents during the project.

4) Make sure the checks are made out jointly to you and the contractor. "This is very important," Surratt stressed. "If the lender sends the money directly to the contractor, the homeowner loses a valuable tool for ensuring satisfaction. We make checks jointly payable, so that the homeowner doesn't hand over any money until they are completely satisfied."

5) Have the work inspected. Most qualified home improvement lenders will insist on a final inspection of the project. "Then we know the work was done right, the homeowner knows it was done right and everyone should be happy with the final result," Surratt said.

6) If you're not happy with the quality of work done on your home, first contact the contractor and try to work things out. If that doesn't work, contact your lender or, if you paid for the project yourself, call your local Better Business Bureau.

For more information, go to www.conseco.com or call 1-877-683-8733.