

**Asking for Social Media “Recommendations” for Contractors**

Spring is the time of year when consumers are anxious to get those home improvement projects started but it’s important to research the contractor’s record before signing a contract so you don’t run into problems. While many consumer’s turn to social media on a daily basis for information sharing, there has also been a rise in people seeking “recommendations” for a home improvement contractor and other service providers.

Unfortunately, not all recommendations you receive online will be from reputable sources. Some may come from friends or family members of the contractor just trying to help them obtain more business. Other recommendations may be made by employees of the company themselves, becoming members of local online groups to make suggestions when people post “looking for contractor for renovation project”. Some of the “recommendations” may not even be legitimate or registered contractors so it’s important to do your homework and only use these as suggestions and a place to start your research, not a one stop shop.

Keep in mind that the contractors recommended may not be registered as Home Improvement Contractors (HIC) as required by Pennsylvania law. In order to register as an HIC there are a few, but basic requirements. The business must register and renew every 2 years through the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General through the Home Improvement Contractor Registration process. That process requires the business to provide a physical address (not a P.O. Box), a landline telephone number and provide proof of adequate insurance coverage. It’s advisable to always ask the business for a certificate of insurance and verify it’s an active policy by calling the insurance company prior to signing a contract. This registration does not imply that the business is qualified just that they have registered to do business legally so references and online review sites are still helpful pieces of the puzzle to determine if you’re dealing with a reputable contractor. To further protect yourself make sure you do some basic research on the company prior to signing a contract. Ask the company for their Home Improvement Contractor (HIC) number and verify that it’s active through the Attorney General’s website, <https://hicsearch.attorneygeneral.gov/>.

Ask them for the business’ physical address and phone number. Request a written estimate. Make sure the estimate or contract has a detailed description of the work to be performed, the materials to be used, a breakdown of costs, and a start date and a completion date. If any warranty is offered, that should also be in writing. By law, any contract that is signed in your home allows you a 3-day right to cancel. This statement should be in writing, on the contract, for it to be a legitimate contract in compliance with the Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act. If you don’t have internet access or need assistance researching the record of a contractor you’re considering hiring then please call Bucks County Consumer Protection to inquire if there are any complaints in our database against the contractor. One of the most valuable tools you have is at your fingertips, a basic web search of the business. Just “google” the company name and location and typically within the first page of results you’ll see any review sites or BBB records for the business that you can read through and see if anyone else has reported any issues with the company. If there isn’t any information available online that could be a red flag and you should do further research or call Bucks County Consumer Protection for assistance. If you have decided on a contractor, they may by law only request a one-third deposit up front plus any special order materials, if any, which need to be detailed in the agreement. It is not recommended nor is there any reason to pay in full until the work is completed to your satisfaction. Once the bill is paid in full, there is no incentive for the business to come back and complete the work. So remember, an online “recommendation” is just a starting point.

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<b>Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force</b>	
Bucks County District Attorney’s Office 215-348-6344	A Woman’s Place (AWP) 1-800-220-8116
Bucks County Area Agency on Aging 267-880-5700	Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection 215-348-6060
Bucks County Coroner’s Office 215-348-3852	Bucks County Register of Wills 215-348-6265
Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA) 1-800-675-6900	US Dept. of Health and Human Services/OIG 1-800-447-8477
<a href="http://www.buckscounty.org/LivingAndWorking/CrimesAgainstOlderAdults">http://www.buckscounty.org/LivingAndWorking/CrimesAgainstOlderAdults</a>	
<b>24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505</b>	