



Protect Yourself from Home Repair Rip-offs

Be prepared when you get unsolicited offers for a home inspection to uncover damage and/or present a claim to your insurer. Take a look at these tips from the Better Business Bureau and the Office of the Illinois Attorney General to guide you to a decision that may help prevent a home repair scammer to profit from your loss.

Don't Give In to Pressure: Most would probably agree that it's a bad idea to sign a contract with a stranger at your front door, but it happens quite frequently. The key to the scammer's success is his ability to apply subtle pressures by using tactics and phrases like:

- Tactic 1: Don't be left behind!
 - "Look at our signs. The entire neighborhood has suffered damage. Better sign a contract now before the cost of materials increase."
- Tactic 2: Don't worry about the cost!
 - "We deal with your insurance company all of the time. They accept our estimates," or
 - "I left the amounts blank on our contract. We can fill them in after we settle with your insurance company. You're only responsible for your deductible."
- Tactic 3: Get in on the deal!
 - "We've reduced our markup to secure a foothold in this market."
 - "We're a national company and better pricing on materials than the local contractors."
 - "We offer a discount for cash."

Do Your Homework: When you are getting bids, be thorough and take the time to check on details. The bids should contain identical specifications for the scope of repairs, material and labor.

- Carefully vet and secure bids from at least three contractors
- Check their references, licenses and insurance
- Do not sign a contract you don't understand, and don't leave any spaces blank
- Be sure to include an agreement in the contract regarding schedule and method of payment. The BBB recommends the rule of thirds:
 - Pay one third at the start of the project
 - Pay one third when work is 50 percent completed
 - Pay the final third upon completion
- Make the contractor responsible for securing permits and ask that he provide a lien waiver when the work is completed

Important! Don't let a stranger on your roof or into your home. Also, be aware that scammers may try to damage the roof while "inspecting" it or distract the homeowner while an accomplice ransacks the home.

Visit [Allstate Be Aware and Prepare](#) and the [Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety](#) for more, helpful information.