

## **Avoiding Problems with Builders**

### **Building Regulation Guidance Note**

The Building Regulations do not at present go much beyond health and safety standards. They do not cover the quality of building work carried out. The Local Authority Building Control Surveyor will ensure that the Building Regulation requirements are met and any contraventions of the Regulations are rectified; but he can not get involved in consumer protection. All too often the Building Control Surveyor has no option but to accept work that meets health and safety requirements but which falls short of any realistic quality threshold.

If you are not a 'Do It Yourself' expert you will have to find a reliable contractor. A few sensible precautions taken at the outset could mean the difference between money well spent or money wasted.

- **Choosing A Contractor**

Choose your contractor with care. Ask friends and neighbours whom they recommend and draw up a list setting out exactly what you want done. Find out in advance what it will cost by getting an estimate or a quotation. An estimate is generally a rough price, while a quotation is normally a fixed price. Make sure you know what you are getting and ask for it to be put in writing. Check whether prices quoted include VAT. Obtain estimates or quotations from several firms and consider them carefully. Make sure that they cover everything that you require.

Do not choose a contractor just because a generous guarantee is offered. A ten year guarantee for a new extension to your house may be worthless if the firm goes out of business. Insurance backed guarantee schemes, however, are available for building work through some trade associations. For long term schemes make sure that the insurance covers the same period as the guarantee.

Get a written agreement or contract covering all the important points: the work to be done, the price, how long the job will take. Read it carefully. If it is important to you that the work is completed by a certain date, make sure that a finishing date is stated in the contract, and that there are specific conditions to cover compensation for delay.

Steer clear of paying money in advance, though the contractor may reasonably ask for deposits for ordering special goods, like made to measure windows.

**Do not pay for work until it has been completed to your satisfaction and the Local Authority Building Control Surveyor has issued a completion certificate for the work.**



If it is a large job you might be asked for stage payments for work done, but always keep, say, up to 25% of the total bill unpaid until you are satisfied that all the work has been done properly. This is the best way to ensure the contractor will put right any faults.

- **If Things Go Wrong**

Complain to the contractor, giving them a chance to put the matter right. If you are not satisfied put your complaint in writing, saying what you want done, and set a deadline.

Keep copies of letters along with a diary of events and a note of any telephone calls. Take photographs if relevant.

If you telephone:

1. make a note beforehand of what you want to say;
2. have any documents handy;
3. get the name of the person you speak to;
4. write down the date and time and what is said;
5. follow up your call with a letter, particularly if your complaint is a serious one.

Putting it in writing:

1. describe the work carried out;
2. say when the work was done, and how much it costs;
3. explain what is wrong, any action you have already taken, to whom you spoke and what happened;
4. say what you want done to remedy the situation – for example the job done again without charge;
5. consider using recorded delivery so that you can check whether your letter has been received;
6. keep copies of any letters you send. Do not send original documents, such as receipts and guarantees – send copies instead.

- **Taking Further Action**

Getting a satisfactory outcome when things do go wrong can sometimes be easy – but not always. Most builders do act fairly and try to resolve complaints effectively. Do not give up at the first hurdle. If you have a valid complaint you have a right to have the problem sorted out.

Find out if the contractor belongs to a trade association and whether it offers any extra consumer protection. You can find the names and addresses of relevant trade associations from your local library; and contractors who are members of trade associations will usually publicise this and will be able to supply you with the associations addresses and telephone numbers.

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been dealt with properly by the contractor or trade association, you may wish to consider going to arbitration or court. If you would like independent advice on the merits of your case, seek advice from a Trading Standards Department, consumer adviser, solicitor or other expert.

- **Please Note**

Whilst every care has been taken in compiling this information the Council cannot accept responsibility for any inaccuracies.

### Translation Information

If English is not your first language and you would like more information about this document, or if you require information in large print or Braille or on tape, please contact (01325) 406214.

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下電話聯係並報出參考號碼：01325 406214

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