

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



**Department of Human Services
Division of Elderly Affairs**

RHODE ISLAND SENIOR BEAT

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**LET THE BUYER BEWARE-TIPS FOR CONTRACTING HOME
MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR SERVICES**

CRANSTON --- You want to stay in your home; but you will need help keeping the house safe and in good shape. Whether the job is large or small, hiring reliable help or contracting for home maintenance and repair services can be difficult. This is particularly true in a challenging economy where anyone who can hammer a nail or handle a screwdriver can claim to be a contractor. Simply stated, it's important to make sure the people you hire are dependable, honest, and reliable.

Let's start with the major jobs. Repairing or replacing a new roof, installing a new boiler or air conditioning, paving the driveway, trimming or taking down trees are expensive projects. Hiring the wrong contractor can prove to be not only expensive, but also dangerous. Before signing that contract on the dotted line, remember these basic rules.

It's a good idea to get at least three bids, in writing, from separate companies. Proposals should include a complete listing of the work to be done, the suggested cost, and a tentative schedule of when the work will begin and how long it will take to complete.

Make sure that the contractor has an actual business address. The contractor should be licensed and bonded. Ask to see proof. Contact the Better Business Bureau serving the Rhode Island area at 508-652-4800 to check on any complaints or information about the company. Call the Rhode Island Contractors Board of Registration at 222-1268 to verify that the company has satisfied that agency's professional requirements.

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RI Senior Beat-June 21, 2013-hiring help and contractors-page 2

Are they a local contractor, or just a franchise of a larger national or regional company? Go online to research any comments made by consumers about the company and their quality of work. Interview the contractors. After all, they are looking for a job. Ask for references. If someone in your neighborhood has had work done previously by a contractor, talk to them about their experiences. While no system is foolproof, a little research can go a long way towards avoiding expensive headaches, aggravation, or even legal proceedings later on.

Now, you'll need someone to do those small jobs such as repairing the deck, fixing the screen doors or windows, or even doing the spring and fall cleaning. When you look at it, the guidelines for hiring a handyman are not much different than for hiring a contractor.

First, make a list of the work you need done. Get at least three local references from people, preferably neighbors, who have used the services of the handyman you are thinking of hiring. Check out web sites like Craigslist or Angie's List for comments on the person's work. The person should be bonded, licensed, and insured. Get a written estimate for the work. The estimate should include material and labor costs.

Find out if the handyman would be asking for any money in advance to buy materials for the job. If the answer is yes, find out how much money is being requested. Establish a schedule for the work to be done. Get a written final contract. Negotiate guarantees and get the guarantees in writing. And remember, you usually get what you pay for. The cheapest price may not be the best way for you to go.

You need to feel comfortable with the person you hire. If you don't, trust your instincts and move on to the next person. As a final safeguard, call the Better Business Bureau to see if there are any pending claims or complaints against the person. Taking a little time to research the person's qualifications, reputation, and quality of work is well worth your time and effort.

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The Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of programs and services for Rhode Islanders ages 60 and older and for adults with disabilities. Questions or requests for additional information on the issues of growing older, or for issues concerning adults with disabilities in Rhode Island should be directed to: Larry Grimaldi, Rhode Island Senior Beat, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs, 74 West Road, Cranston, RI 02920 or faxed to 462-0545. The e-mail address is lgrimaldi@dea.ri.gov.