Repairing homes after the Alberta wildfires
Tips on hiring a contractor and signing a contract

As Albertans return to communities after the wildfires, they may need to hire a contractor to repair or renovate their homes resulting from fire or smoke damage.

Prepaid contractors

Contractors who require a deposit before all the work is complete, and enter into a contract away from their place of business are considered prepaid contracting businesses and require a licence from Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Prepaid contractors must be licensed to conduct business in Alberta. You can check if the contractor has a licence by using the search tool at: www.servicealberta.ca/find-if-business-is-licenced.cfm.

Businesses whose contracts are covered by specified warranty programs may be exempt from licensing. Be sure to ask about the contractor’s licensing status before signing a contract or paying any money.

Before hiring a contractor, do your homework

- Check if a business/individual has had past enforcement action taken against them following this link: www.alberta.ca/lookup/business-enforcement-search-tool.aspx.
- Contact your local Better Business Bureau to check reliability reports for information about a specific company’s complaint history: www.bbb.org
- Get written estimates from at least three contractors.
- Always insist on a written contract as verbal contracts are hard to prove if a dispute arises.
- Ask for references that you can contact to evaluate the contractor and the quality of their work.
- Provide each business with a detailed description of the work you want completed and the materials you want the contractor to use.

Beware of contractors who:

- grossly overcharge for their services
- quote a price without seeing your property
- refuse to give you a written contract outlining what they will do
- will not allow you to get other estimates
- use a post office box as their mailing address or an answering service for a telephone number
- will not commit to a specific start and completion date
- demand large down payments to buy materials, or use other pressure tactics
- offer a special price
- promise a discount if you allow them to use your home to advertise their work (the contractor has probably made the same offer to everyone).
Written estimates should include:

- a complete description of the work that will be done
- the type and quality of materials that will be used
- the project start and completion dates
- itemized costs and the total price
- a statement of any guarantees made by the contractor
- the required method of payment.

Cancelling a contract

Consumers have the right to cancel prepaid contracts within 10 days of receiving a copy of the signed contract and have extended cancellation rights if the prepaid contractor is not licensed, the contract does not conform to the requirements under the Consumer Protection Act, or the goods or services were not all provided within 30 days of the delivery date specified in the contract. For more information, visit https://www.alberta.ca/hiring-contractor.aspx.

Filing a complaint

If you believe a prepaid contractor isn’t licensed, has not followed the requirements under the Consumer Protection Act, or not fulfilled the obligations of your contract, you can file a complaint at www.alberta.ca/file-consumer-complaint.aspx.

For more information:

- The Consumer protection page (www.alberta.ca/consumer-protection.aspx) has information about the Consumer Investigations Unit and the laws that protect consumers.
- In the event that you find yourself in a situation where you may wish to build a new home, the Residential builder licensing page has information on licensing and permitting for the construction of new homes (www.alberta.ca/builder-licensing.aspx).