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Homeowners advised to beware of repair scams

Edmonton... Southern Alberta homeowners are reminded to be wary when hiring contractors to repair flood and storm damage.

“Unfortunately, natural disasters present an opportunity for con artists looking to take advantage of people who have already been through more than enough,” said Heather Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, responsible for consumer protection. “There are some simple steps homeowners can take to protect themselves before hiring a contractor.”

Under the *Fair Trading Act*, contractors who enter into contracts outside a regular place of business and ask for money before the job is completed are required to have a prepaid contractor license from Service Alberta and post a security. Contractors could face penalties for violating the act.

There are many honest companies in southern Alberta and consumers are advised to do careful research before hiring prepaid contractors. Homeowners may want to contact homebuilders or trade associations for a list of professional contractors and should hire only after checking references and contacting local Better Business Bureaus for a company’s complaint history.

The government also advises the following steps for consumers:

- beware of unsolicited door-to-door offers or deals from contractors who claim to be in the area;
- if the contractor wants payment upfront, check to see if they are licensed by searching online at www.servicealberta.gov.ab.ca/183.cfm or by calling the Consumer Contact Centre toll free at 1-877-427-4088 in Alberta;
- obtain several estimates and ensure contracts are in writing, including start and finish dates, and materials to be used;
- include a holdback provision in the contract to deal with any deficiencies and ensure suppliers have been paid.

Albertans have the unconditional right to cancel - within 10 days - any prepaid home renovations or repair work solicited, discussed or finalized in their homes. Additional cancellation rights exist in certain circumstances. In all cases, consumers are advised not to agree to any renovation or repair work until the full details and costs are disclosed in writing.

Service Alberta’s *Home Renovations* tipsheet contains more helpful information for consumers and can be found online at www.servicealberta.gov.ab.ca/1018.cfm

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