

Best Practices for Hiring a Contractor After a Disaster

To protect yourself and make sure you find the best, most qualified contractor for your needs, follow these tips:

- **Involve your insurance adjuster early:** Seek their input on bids and vetted professionals to ensure alignment with your coverage and minimize potential claim disputes.
- **Research your project.** Before selecting a contractor, research the project so you know what the job involves.
- **Get the names of several contractors.** It is a good idea to get bids from several contractors. Friends and neighbors who have undertaken similar projects may give you the names of contractors they recommend.
- **Check references and beware of red flags:** Contact at least three recent clients for feedback and scan for complaints via the Better Business Bureau or Attorney General's office.
- **Get written bids on your job.** Get at least two or three written bids for your project. Carefully compare the written bids to ensure each includes everything you want. Never accept a verbal estimate.
- **Verify licensing, bonding, and insurance:** Confirm the contractor's active registration at the [Department of Labor and Industry's website](#), plus proof of liability insurance and bonding to protect against accidents or unfinished work.
- **Prioritize local expertise:** Focus on Montana-based contractors with proven disaster recovery experience, such as hail or fire damage restoration. Validate their references and state code knowledge through the Department of Labor and Industry.
- **Verify disaster-specific credentials:** If federal aid is involved, confirm the contractor's familiarity with FEMA processes. Inquire about their experience with local rebuilds and permitting.



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- **Leverage state resources:** For concerns, report to the Department of Justice's Office of Consumer Protection at 800-481-6896 or 406-444-4500 or visit <https://dojmt.gov/office-of-consumer-protection>.
- **Secure a detailed written contract:** Ensure it spells out all terms, including scope of work, materials specs, timelines, change order processes, warranties, and dispute resolution, and have it reviewed by a lawyer if the project is large.
- **Protect your payments:** Limit any upfront deposit to 10-20% for materials only (avoid cash or full prepayments); opt for checks or credit cards for a clear paper trail. Withhold final payment until after a thorough inspection and receipt of a lien release.
- **Inspect the project and communicate with the contractor.** Whenever possible, make sure all changes, problems or complaints (from you or the contractor) are recorded in a letter between you and the contractor.
- **Beware of Con Artists.** Home repair scams flourish following severe weather or a natural disaster. Steer clear of unsolicited door-to-door offers or high-pressure tactics.



For more information on how to choose a contractor visit:
<https://dojmt.gov/office-of-consumer-protection/choosing-a-contractor/>.

Montanans can report any scams or fraudulent activity to the Montana Department of Justice's Office of Consumer Protection at contactocp@mt.gov, or 406-444-4500 (toll-free: 800-481-6896), or online at: <https://dojmt.gov/office-of-consumer-protection/>.