

July 16, 2003

## CONSUMER AFFAIRS LAUNCHES ONLINE DATABASE OF LICENSED HOME IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTORS

### *Database Provides Instant Access to Legal Contractors*

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) today launched a new online database, providing a comprehensive listing of all licensed home improvement contractors. By visiting the DCA web site at [www.nyc.gov/consumers](http://www.nyc.gov/consumers), New Yorkers now have instant access to the more than 6,000 legal contractors, searching by either company name or license number. The database will be updated monthly.

"Home improvement contractors are our biggest headache," said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. "Instantly checking whether a contractor is licensed will undoubtedly help protect consumers and allow for more educated decisions. We are also hopeful that by listing contractors who are legal it will provide more incentive to get licensed. The City's web site receives hundreds of thousands of hits each month and we can't think of a better showcase for legitimate businesses."

By law, any person or business that solicits, canvasses, sells, performs, or obtains home improvement work where all costs come to more than \$200, must get a license from DCA to operate legally in New York City. Home improvement work can be any of the following: awnings, basements, central heating/air conditioning, central vacuum cleaning system, communications systems, driveways, fences, garages, landscaping, patios, porches, storm windows, swimming pools, and terraces.

Although a license does not ensure competence, requirements for contractors to operate legally provide further protection for consumers. License-holders are required to undergo a criminal history check, pass a written examination, have workers' compensation insurance, and post a bond or contribute to the DCA Home Improvement Contractor Trust Fund, which can provide up to \$15,000 in restitution to consumers - but only to those who use a licensed contractor. Last year the DCA received nearly 700 complaints and paid more than \$330,000 in restitution to consumers who were ripped off by unscrupulous contractors. Complaints include contractors abandoning a job before it is completed, not performing work to industry standards, and more.

"Many New Yorkers don't realize that contractors need to be licensed, even with jobs considered small," added Commissioner Dykstra. "Using a licensed contractor, checking references, and paying as little up front as possible are just a few things you can do that could save money and huge aggravation."

As part of the agency's effort to increase the number of licensed contractors citywide, DCA has held special licensing sessions at Prospect Heights High School and at Fairfield Towers in Brooklyn, with the Korean-American Construction Association in Flushing, Queens. Most recently, DCA held an HIC information session in cooperation with Home Depot at Gateway Plaza in Brooklyn.

To request a license application, file a complaint, check a vendor's complaint history, or to request a copy of the DCA Home Improvement Consumer Guide, call 311, or visit DCA online at [www.nyc.gov/consumers](http://www.nyc.gov/consumers). HIC license applications are also available at DCA's Licensing Center (Mondays through Fridays) located at 42 Broadway, 5th floor, in Manhattan.