

March 18, 2004

**DCA COMMISSIONER GRETCHEN DYKSTRA HAND DELIVERS
\$15,000 RESTITUTION CHECK TO STATEN ISLAND
HOMEOWNER FOR DAMAGE BY AN UNSCRUPULOUS HOME
IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTOR**

*One of Ten Checks Recently Distributed to City Homeowners,
Totaling More than \$140,000;
DCA Continues Aggressive Enforcement Against
Unlicensed Home Improvement Contractors*

New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra today hand delivered a \$15,000 restitution check to Staten Island homeowner Veronica Douglas as reimbursement for damages by an unscrupulous home improvement contractor. Ms. Douglas is one of two Staten Island homeowners and ten citywide who have recently received restitution out of the DCA Home Improvement Trust Fund, totaling more than \$140,000. DCA's Trust Fund reimburses consumers - up to a maximum of \$15,000 - who hired a licensed contractor that subsequently performed shoddy work, went out of business, or left town.

"We're thrilled to provide some relief to homeowners who have been ripped off," said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. "With spring right around the corner, it's important to remind New Yorkers that contractors need to be licensed to perform jobs that cost more than \$200. While a license doesn't guarantee competence, it does provide further protection, and sometimes reimbursement, if the work is shoddy or incomplete. Being careful and taking precautions can help prevent a simple repair from becoming a giant headache."

There are approximately 6,500 licensed home improvement contractors in New York City, with more than 800 based in Staten Island. In 2003, the DCA was able to reimburse approximately \$700,000 to City homeowners from the Trust Fund, as well as continue increased enforcement by seizing 50 vehicles (11 in Staten Island) belonging to unlicensed contractors. In Staten Island just last week DCA inspectors seized an additional three vehicles. Contractors who had their vehicles seized were required to pay \$1,000 in fines, resolve any outstanding complaints, pay into the DCA Home Improvement Trust Fund and agree to get licensed before retrieving their vehicle.

"Our inspectors are in all five boroughs and are on the lookout for anyone doing home improvement work without a license," added Commissioner Dykstra. "Those that flout the law face substantial penalties and we'll continue to seize their vehicles. Homeowners can also help by calling 311 and alerting us if they see a contractor working in their neighborhood without a license."

Licensed contractors are required to pay a license fee, undergo a criminal history check, pass a written examination, and contribute to the HIC Trust Fund bi-annually at license renewal, or post a bond. A license also provides benefits for contractors allowing them to pay into the Trust Fund, and therefore saving the expense of obtaining a bond. In addition, licensed contractors have greater recourse to defend themselves from false claims or when a client refuses to pay when the job is done.

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

To request a license application, file a complaint, check a vendor's complaint history, or to request a copy of the DCA's *Consumer Guide to Home Improvement*, call 311, or visit DCA online at www.nyc.gov/consumers