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Hiring Contractors? Check Licenses Carefully

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BALTIMORE -- When the economy took a nosedive, complaints about unlicensed contractors increased -- two of which came from women who thought they were hiring fully licensed professionals.

Patience Hunter's home in Severn is a visible symbol of her humiliation.

"I'm hurt because I have a daughter home from school. We're living in closets now. I can't do anything right now. My neighbors are laughing at us. I'm embarrassed," she told 11 News I-Team reporter Barry Simms.

[Check On Contractor Licensing](#)

She's embarrassed by the large hole in the back of the house that's covered by a giant piece of plastic.

Hunter had a home improvement contract with Delante Scott's company, Tate's Home Improvement. She paid the company a deposit of \$12,000 to expand her 79-year-old mother's home.

"I paid for two bedrooms and a bathroom. This is the extension for one bedroom. Where the gutter starts would be the bathroom," she showed Simms.



Patience Hunter told I-Team reporter Barry Simms: "I can't do anything right now. My neighbors are laughing at us. I'm embarrassed."

She also showed the I-Team electric wiring that remains exposed.

"He told me, 'Don't let the kids come out here because the electric is on the ground.' We noticed," Hunter said.

She said she thought Scott was fully licensed by the state and bonded. He even gave her a card with a license number on it.

The I-Team checked and found the number was for a construction license through Anne Arundel County, but the Maryland Home Improvement Commission said that's not enough. He must also have a license through them, and he doesn't.

When the I-Team confronted Scott at his Annapolis home, he yelled at Simms, saying, "I'm going to deal with her, you understand me?"

He told Simms he was going to finish the job.

Hunter isn't the only Maryland resident upset with Scott.

Gwen and Walter Young said Scott didn't complete work at their home and that he owes them \$3,000. In 2008, a judge ordered he pay full restitution, but he only paid a small portion of it.

The I-Team confronted him outside a courthouse about that situation, but he wouldn't comment on the judge's decision.

"Regardless of whether you did it using a false number or you did it using no number at all, the Home Improvement Commission will still prosecute you."

- Hugh Lowery

taking him to court.

Robert Scott Curran, another unlicensed contractor, didn't want to talk, either.

Lucille Mavronis of south Baltimore said Curran owes her money. She filed a complaint with the state and they're

"I gave him \$6,030 for nothing," Mavronis said.

Mavronis admitted her home was cluttered long before Curran came in but said she thinks he added to it by leaving an old sink, toilet and other debris in her yard. She claims he did poor work.

"He did wrong. He has to pay for it. He shouldn't be doing this to handicapped or older people," she said.

The I-Team discovered that the license number on Curran's invoice belongs to another company. When Simms contacted them, they said they did not give Curran permission to use it.

The I-Team found out he had done the same thing before.

When asked by Simms if he got permission to use the license, he told Simms to "get the (expletive) out of my face."

Moments afterward, Curran apologized. Off camera, he told Simms he did a good job on Mavronis' house. He said it was in poor condition and he did extra repairs.

He said he cancelled the job after the MHIC told him to stop and a judge gave him probation, ordering him to pay \$2,300 in restitution to another customer.

"Regardless of whether you did it using a false number or you did it using no number at all, the Home Improvement Commission will still prosecute you," said Hugh Lowery, one of seven MHIC investigators handling contractor complaints.

MHIC Executive Director Steve Smitson said as the economy has declined, complaints against unlicensed contractors have increased, making up nearly half of the 2,000 complaints received last year.

"They're putting you and the safety of your family at risk. Most homes are a family's greatest investment. If you put it in the hands of an unlicensed contractor, there are no guarantees -- no protections," Smitson said.

Experts said there are some red flags to watch out for when hiring contractors.

They include watching out for contractors who don't provide a full name, permanent address, phone and MHIC license number, as well as those who accept cash payments only.

Experts said contractors should also have the letters MHIC and a license number printed on their trucks, as required by law.

To check to see if a contractor has a current license, click on the link provided about.

To get one, the contractor must prove that they carry general liability insurance. Homeowners have access to a state guarantee fund if problems arise.

*Article, including the related video **'Make Sure Contractors Are Using Legitimate Licenses'**, is available at <http://www.wbaltv.com/11investigates/20145554/detail.html>*

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