

## Beware of Chimney Cleaning and Repair Scams

As consumers prepare their homes for colder weather, the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation is advising homeowners to be wary of possible chimney cleaning and repair scams.

Scam artists sometimes lure homeowners with door-to-door sales pitches, phone solicitations, and/or ads offering extremely low prices. Once they get into your home, they may untruthfully claim expensive repairs are needed immediately to prevent serious problems like carbon monoxide leaks or fires.

### Tips before getting your chimney repaired:

1. Ask for photo/video proof of recommended repairs, and do not feel pressured into allowing work to begin immediately.
2. Chimney cleaning is not considered home improvement, but all related work, such as installation or repair of a chimney cap, installation of a solid-fuel device, liner repair, and mortar replacement require a home improvement contractor (HIC) registration and a construction supervisor license (CSL).
3. Check with the local building inspector/department to see if there are permitting requirements for work beyond cleaning.



Consumers can check whether someone is registered as a home improvement contractor through the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation website or by calling (888) 283-3757 (toll-free in Massachusetts) or (617) 973-8787. The website is searchable by registration number, registrant name, city and zip code. The 'search by city' feature allows consumers to locate contractors in their community.

Consumers can check whether someone is licensed as a construction supervisor through the Department of Public Safety website or by calling (617) 727-3200.

### Tips before hiring a chimney sweep:

- Think twice before hiring any company that solicits your business. Ask for identification, literature about the company, and, if they have one, a copy of their standard contract.
- Ask family and friends for referrals and get multiple quotes.
- Try to use local companies so you can easily get in touch with them to follow-up.
- Ask how long the company has been in business.
- Find out if the company is accredited by the Chimney Safety Institute of America. Though not required by law, it is recommended by fire departments, as it speaks to their qualifications.
- Ask for current references and check them by calling and visiting the site of work they have performed. Do not simply rely on a telephone reference, unless you already know and trust the party you are calling.
- Ask if the company has a valid business liability insurance policy.
- Check out the company with the Better Business Bureau (BBB) and the Office of the Attorney General. The BBB can tell you if the business is a member, and both agencies can tell you if the company has any complaints lodged against it.
- Ask if the company provides a warranty for its work, and if so, how long the work is warranted.