



News Release

CONTRACTORS STATE LICENSE BOARD

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Check the License First!

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CSLB Urges Imperial County Earthquake Victims to Only Hire California-Licensed Contractors for Repairs

Before repairing damage from quake and aftershocks, check the license first!

SACRAMENTO – The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) is urging residents of Calexico, El Centro and surrounding areas to only hire California-licensed contractors if they experienced damage to their homes, outbuildings, or businesses following last Sunday’s 7.2 magnitude earthquake and subsequent aftershocks.

“Unfortunately, unlicensed—and sometimes unscrupulous—people show up after natural disasters and try to take advantage of victims at a vulnerable time,” said CSLB Registrar Steve Sands. “It only takes a few minutes to check the status of a contractor license on CSLB’s Web site or by calling our toll-free telephone system. Now, more than ever, homeowners need to be cautious about hiring reputable people to repair their property.”



By checking CSLB’s Web site, www.cslb.ca.gov or www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com, property owners can find the licensing background of their contractor and have access to a host of bilingual tips and publications that explain consumer rights and best practices when hiring a contractor. This includes post-earthquake work ranging from mobile homes that have shifted off their support systems to debris removal and hot water heater replacement. Bilingual CSLB staff are available between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. at CSLB’s special Disaster Hotline by calling 1-800-962-1125, except on state furlough days, which are the first, second, and third Fridays of each month.

CSLB licensees have a minimum of four years of journey-level experience in the trade for which they are licensed, and have passed tests related to their craft and California contracting law. CSLB licensees are also required to have workers’ compensation insurance for employees (and themselves if they are Roofing (C-39) contractors) to ensure the homeowner is not financially liable in the event of a work-related injury on their property. Since 2005, all new licensees and those adding to or changing their classifications have also been required to submit fingerprints for criminal background checks.

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“After going through the fear and then the ordeal of property damage after these earthquakes, the last thing people need is to be victimized a second time by unlicensed scammers,” said Sands. “Unlicensed contractors should know that they could face felony charges if they’re caught contracting in a disaster area.”

Undercover enforcement operations are being planned for the Calexico and El Centro areas. In addition to the potential felony charge for contracting without a license in a disaster area, a new California law has strengthened the misdemeanor penalties for contracting without a license. Anyone who contracts for more than \$500 worth of work and materials without a license faces up to \$5,000 in penalties and/or up to 90 days in county jail. Subsequent violations carry even stronger penalties.

Verify the status of a contractor’s license on the CSLB Web site: www.cslb.ca.gov or www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com or by calling the toll-free automated line: 800-321-CSLB (2752). Helpful publications in English and Spanish and other languages can be ordered or downloaded from the Web site, such as *What You Should Know Before Hiring a Contractor (Lo que usted debería saber antes de contrar a un contratista)*, with tips on hiring and working with home improvement contractors, and *After a Disaster, Don’t Get Scammed (¡Después de un desastre, no se deje estafar!)*. CSLB’s video *Rebuilding After a Natural Disaster*, is also available for viewing at CSLB’s Web site.

CSLB urges you to follow these guidelines before hiring a contractor:

- Don’t hire the first contractor who comes along.
- Don’t rush into repairs, no matter how badly they’re needed.
- Hire only licensed contractors and ask to see their license and a photo ID to ensure they are who they say they are. Always check the license number on CSLB’s Web site at www.cslb.ca.gov, and contact the business directly if you have any questions.
- Don’t pay more than 10 percent or \$1,000, whichever is less, as a down payment. There is an exception for about two dozen licensees who carry special bonds to protect consumers. These exceptions are noted on CSLB’s Web site.
- Don’t pay in cash, and don’t let payments get ahead of the work.
- Get at least three bids, check references, and get a written contract.

CSLB also reminds residents to make sure their contractor gets all the necessary permits and required inspections from city or county building department for any construction, reconstruction, or installation of air conditioners, heaters, or water heaters.

CSLB licenses about 310,000 contractors. In any given year, complaints are filed against only 3% of licensed contractors. In fiscal year 2008-09, CSLB helped consumers recover nearly \$36 million in ordered restitution.