

## USE VIGILANCE WHEN CHOOSING BUILDING CONTRACTORS

By Rachel Matthews, Wilton Building Department 2008

This is another reminder to all homeowners that work done to your house usually requires a permit from the Town of Wilton. Even if the project seems minor, do not assume that permits are not required. While there are a few things that do not require a permit, it is advised that you contact the Wilton Building Department directly for guidance. When in doubt, call our office at 203 563-0177. Our hours are from 7:30-4pm; the inspectors are in the office from 7:30-10 a.m.

We continue to have numerous calls from homeowners complaining about their contractors not completing work, poor workmanship or doing work beyond the scope of the original agreement and then charging extra for this work. It is unfortunate but the local Building Departments have no power to intervene when problems arise between homeowners and contractors. The Department of Consumer Protection is the agency to handle these complaints.

Our advice would be to make sure your contractor is properly licensed and insured, provides you with verifiable references. Be sure to ask to see this before you sign a contract. When you are given a contract, be sure to read it carefully. Take your time. This is your project. If any changes are made, make sure both you and your contractor sign a job change form and keep your copy with your contract. You cannot be too careful. You should have backup in writing as verbal agreements are usually not legally binding.

If it is necessary to take legal action against your contractor or file a complaint with Consumer Protection, (860) 713-6110, it is imperative that you have your signed contract and related documents.

Always check the status of your contractor's registration throughout the job period as that could change at any time. Consumer Protection can and does change the status on a contractor's registration pending investigations of complaints. Remember that you get what you pay for and the lowest bid is not always the best one.

Take a proactive part in your project. Have the contractor provide you with all the information such as subcontractors' names, licenses and insurance information. Ask for copies of your permits from the Town for your records. Inquire as to when inspections are scheduled and find out what the outcome is. In other words, do your homework and do not let contractors convince you into giving them full reign over your job. You should be involved for your own good. Also any changes to the original plans or scope of work approved by the town, minor or not, require approval from the town. Do not let your contractor or anyone convince you that because it is minor "it's no big deal". If there is any question in your mind at any stage of your project, call the Building Department.

Finally, you should feel confident in your contractor and trust him or her. If you suspect them of being less than honest with you from the beginning or trying to cut corners,

chances are that it will continue throughout the duration of your project. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. For your protection and the successful completion of your project, you should only hire contractors who are trustworthy, registered with the State of Connecticut in good standing, and insured.