



Get Your Home Improvement Details in Writing

When you agree with a Home Improvement professional to complete a remodeling project, big or small, you are entering into a contract. No matter the size or scope of the project, get the details in writing. A written contract is required by Wisconsin law if you are required to pay any money before a project is completed – which is standard practice for construction jobs. A written contract outlines details and by signing it contractors and clients agree to the terms – and that they understand them.

Not All Contracts Are Equal

The complexity of a contract may be determined by the number of people involved and the complexities of the project. Here are seven basic elements your contract should always include:

1. The name and address of the contractor (company) and the salesperson completing the deal.
2. A detailed description of the job including all specific services to be performed from start to finish. Make it clear to everyone involved what's to happen and when.
3. Include a complete list of materials required – name brand, size, model name and/or number, capacities and quantities required.
4. The total price – including all finance charges, permit fees, etc.
5. An accurate timeline with starting and completion dates stated clearly.
6. An explanation of all warranties on materials, labor and services – clearly identify and define all exceptions or limitations.
7. Formal signatures from all parties must be in place. **NOTE:** don't sign anything until all the blank spaces have been filled in. An oral contract provides no guarantee, it's only valid on paper and signed.

When the contract is done, get copies of all the additional paperwork like warranties, service contracts, retail installment agreements, etc.

When the project is done, you may be asked to sign another document certifying that everything is done as promised. Don't sign until you've inspected every inch of the project and you've confirmed that is it what you expected and you're satisfied.

Three Days to Change Your Mind

Wisconsin law gives you three business days to change your mind if you have second thoughts. The law also requires the contractor to provide you with a lien waiver as a receipt whenever you make partial or final payments. The lien waver guarantees that workers and vendors have been paid and won't be coming to you for their money. This is a critical element when a job includes subcontractors to be paid by the contractor you have the formal contract with.

For additional information, contact the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

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