



**HIGHLANDS COUNTY
BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

Protect Your Home and Business from Unlicensed Activity

Since the landfall of Hurricane Irma homes and businesses with storm-related damage that can take months to repair and restore. Unfortunately, during the aftermath of a storm, unlicensed construction activity can occur, negatively impacting Florida's homes and businesses. This occurs when a person who is not licensed or registered by the state performs or offers to perform a job or service that requires licensure or registration. During a declared State of Emergency, the penalty for unlicensed construction activity is a third-degree felony.

Unlicensed contractors utilize the damage of a storm's aftermath to take advantage of homeowners and residents. Occasionally, these unlicensed contractors will travel from out of state to exploit Floridians living in a disaster area. Because of this, it is important to know that even if the contractor is licensed in a different state, they must attain a license or registration from the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) to perform repairs in Florida.

Consumers should complete the following steps to avoid becoming a victim of unlicensed activity after a storm:

Understand Which Repair Services Require a State Contractor's License

DBPR licenses and regulates construction businesses that modify the structure of a building or home. Roof repairs and replacements require a license, as do newly-installed windows, plumbing repairs and electrical repairs or rewiring. Conversely, cleanup services, including trimming and removing a fallen tree, removing debris or placing a tarp on a roof, do not require a license.

Check with your local building department for additional information on requirements for supplementary permits and licenses.

Ask For Multiple Opinions and Written Estimates.

If your home or business requires repair or restoration services following a natural disaster, request repair estimates from more than one contractor. By requesting several bids, you can validate your first assessment to see if it is a fair estimate. Check the references for each contractor or construction business you are interested in hiring.

Use Good Judgment When it Comes to Finally Signing a Contract and Completing Payments

Do not commit to a contract, make a payment, or provide personal or financial information to a contractor on the spot. Typical contracting scams are committed by individuals who pressure consumers into making a decision on the spot by greatly reducing the price. It is good practice to get everything in writing. This includes a thorough description of work to be completed, the total cost of the repairs, and a date of completion. If the repair requires a permit it is appropriate to withhold a final payment until the inspection is completed.

Always Verify a Contractor's License Before Hiring or Signing a Contract

Per Florida Statute, contractors must include their license number on all advertising, including their business cards. You can verify a contractor's name or license number by visiting www.myfloridalicense.com, calling the DBPR Customer Contact Center at (850) 487-1395, or downloading the free DBPR Mobile app available in the iTunes and Google Play app stores. When verifying a license, make sure the license is active and not delinquent, suspended, revoked, or on probation. In addition to viewing the license's current status, you can also check for public complaints against the contractor.

Report Any Unlicensed Activity

Consumers should report suspected unlicensed activity to DBPR by calling the Unlicensed Activity Hotline at 1 (866) 532-1440 or by emailing ULA@myfloridalicense.com. During a disaster, DBPR may dispatch groups to organize door-to-door sweeps in conjunction with law enforcement, building departments, and other state agencies.

Maintaining a home or business is one of the most significant investments you will make during your lifetime. When it comes to repairing, and renovating a home or business after a natural disaster, make sure to only hire a contractor licensed or registered by the State of Florida. This is the safest and smartest way to protect you and your investments

Emergency Work

The Florida Building Code allows for Emergency Work to be applied for after the work is completed.

105.2.1 Emergency repairs.

Where equipment replacements and repairs must be performed in an emergency situation, the *permit* application shall be submitted within the next working business day to the *building official*.

Work that requires permits?

Items that require permits for this storm related event.

- ✓ Roof repair or replacement of the entire roof.
- ✓ Window or door replacement. Replacing glass does not require a permit. Use safety glass next to doors and above showers and tubs.
- ✓ Electrical repairs to restore power.
- ✓ Sky light replacement.
- ✓ Fence permits. Style must match in historic districts.
- ✓ Aluminum Structures
- ✓ Your insurance company may require proof of a permit and final inspection prior to payment of the claim.

A handyman is not permitted to complete any of the above items nor any work for which a State License is required regardless

Homeowners of a Single-Family Owner Occupied Home May Obtain Permits as an Owner Builder.

Beware of Unlicensed Contractors

- ✓ Always pay by check.
- ✓ Ask to see a copy of the license. A Business Tax Receipt is not a license.

- ✓ Take a picture of the person's driver license, the person and the license plate on the vehicle.

If there are any questions e-mail plans@hcbcc.org or call 863.402-6644.