



Checking registration in Northeast Ohio

By Mason King and Diana Lamirand

TOM MORAN BELIEVES you can never be too careful with contractors. The Angie's List member from Cleveland's West Park neighborhood browsed a home remodeling show in early 2008 and signed up for a free estimate from a company called 1 Day Bath. Erring on the side of caution, Moran checked with the city's Department of Building & Housing to determine if the company was **registered** to work in Cleveland—a requirement for all contractors.

It wasn't, he says, meaning that the city couldn't corroborate that the contractor carried insurance, bonding or a state license for plumbing. Attempts by *Angie's List Magazine* to contact 1 Day Bath were unsuccessful.

The nonregistration was a deal-breaker for Moran, who demands the safeguards that come with contractor registration. "I always check," Moran says. "If Jesus himself came down and said, 'I could do carpentry work

for you,' I would ask, 'Are you registered and bonded?'"

The state of Ohio licenses contractors in electrical, plumbing, HVAC, refrigeration and hydronics (heating and cooling systems that use water as the transfer medium), and requires that those contractors hold liability insurance and pass an exam. The state licenses are mandatory for commercial work, but many Ohio communities also demand that contractors in those trades

hold the state license before they can register locally for residential work.

In Northeast Ohio, contractors often must register in each community before they can pull permits to perform residential work. The requirements can vary, but contractors typically must produce proof of liability insurance and a separate bond. In Cleveland, contractors must submit a \$25,000 compliance bond, which means they agree to comply with city codes.

What's the difference between licensing and registration in Ohio? In general, education, training and the amount of insurance a contractor must carry.



Photo courtesy of Julie Elshaw | After learning that Cedar Falls Brick & Stone Inc. wasn't registered, Julie Elshaw made sure the second contractor she hired was in compliance with local registration laws.

"It protects the consumer," says **Pat DiMarco**, assistant administrator for Building & Housing. "If there's any substandard work, we can use the bond to go after the contractor." In 2008 and so far in 2009, Cleveland has secured \$158,156 for consumers on 21 claims against contractors' bonds, DiMarco says.

When Julie Elshaw and her husband, Derek, hired Cedar Falls Brick & Stone Inc. for a major patio project in 2008, the Eastlake couple believed representative Chris O'Kelley when he said the firm was registered locally, according to Julie. They later learned his claim was false after checking with the city, she says.

Contacted by *Angie's List Magazine*, O'Kelley acknowledges the

DiMarco takes calls from the public about city contractor requirements and can confirm whether a company is registered in Cleveland. He can be reached at 216-664-2884.

firm isn't registered. However, he says he doesn't recall making that claim, and he wasn't even aware of the requirement until trying unsuccessfully to secure a permit.

"We did nothing wrong," he says. The Elshaws recovered the \$3,000 deposit they paid Cedar Falls, joined Angie's List and hired T J Farinacci Landscaping Inc., a two-time Super Service Award winner, to do the patio project. The company is bonded, insured and registered to work in Eastlake. "We don't look at any contractors without checking Angie's List," Julie says. "And we definitely check with the city." ☺



You can check the licensing status of Northeast Ohio companies online or with a phone call. See the My Angie page at angieslist.com for details.