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By the numbers: nine musts for the contract

By SANDRA FLEISHMAN
The Washington Post

Consumer advocates recommend that homeowners always get a written contract to protect themselves against unscrupulous work.

A contract spells out the who, what, where, when and

how much of the project. The agreement should be clear, concise and complete.

Before you sign, make sure the contract contains:

- The contractor's name, address, phone number and license number, if required.
- The payment schedule for the contractor, subcontractors and suppliers.
- The estimated start and completion date.
- The contractor's obligation to obtain all necessary permits.
- How change orders will be handled. A change order — common in remodeling jobs — is a written authorization to the contractor to make a change or addition to work described in the original contract. It could affect the project's cost and schedule. Remodelers often require payment for change orders before work begins.
- A detailed list of all materials, including color, model, size, brand name and product.
- Warranties covering materials and workmanship.
- The names and addresses of the parties honoring the warranties contractor, dis-

tributor or manufacturer must be identified.

■ The length of the warranty period and any limitations also should be spelled out.

■ What the contractor will and will not do. For example, is site clean-up and trash hauling included in the price? Ask for a "broom clause." That makes the contractor responsible for all clean-up work, including spills and stains.

■ A written statement of your right to cancel the contract within three business days if you signed it at home or at a location other than the seller's permanent place of business. During the sales transaction, the salesperson (contractor) must give you two copies of a cancellation form (one to keep and one to send back to the firm) and a copy of the contract or receipt. The contract or receipt must be dated, show the name and address of the seller, and explain the right to cancel. Oral promises also should be added to the written contract, consumer advocates say.

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