

How to Avoid Hiring an Illegal Contractor

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1. Make sure that the cleaning company is bonded, licensed and insured. The key word is insured. Insurance isn't cheap. And that's a good thing for a consumer. Being insured means that there is a policy in place in case of damage caused as a result of the housecleaning. If nothing else, it's the first step in determining if a cleaning company is professional or amateur.

2. Make sure that the cleaning company performs extensive background checks on their employees. A background check costs money. And a lot of companies don't perform these checks for that very reason. But they are important. First off, hiring a convicted felon voids the surety bond. This means that if a theft occurs, then there is no policy in place to protect the victim. Secondly, a consumer needs to know that the strangers in their home have never been arrested for any type of violent crime or theft.

3. Make sure that the cleaning company is really a company. A real cleaning company pays payroll taxes. A real cleaning company pays income taxes. And if they don't, then it's the consumer's legal responsibility to do that for them. Because Uncle Sam wants a cut of the transaction. And if the consumer doesn't do it for them, then the consumer is just as guilty as the cleaning company. Ask for the company to prove that all taxes are being paid.

4. Make sure that the cleaning company only hires legal citizens. A cleaning company hires an illegal immigrant because the labor is cheap. Think about it: If a cleaning company is hiring illegal immigrants, what else are they doing illegally? Now how can a consumer determine if someone is a legal citizen? Refer to point number three. A legal citizen has to pay payroll taxes.

5. Make sure that the cleaning company has more than a handful of customers. Now this technique isn't perfect. There are some quality individual housecleaners out there that follow the law. But the fact is that a cleaning business is easy to start. And the fact

is that a lot of people use this to their advantage. They can start a cleaning business today. Make a little money tomorrow. And then quit the next day. Ask the cleaning company for references. Don't let them dictate the names. Dictate the list. Ask for customers only in a certain zip code. The truth is that most cleaning companies have a standard list of references. They hand them out when someone asks for the list. And these three or four people say all sorts of good things about the company. Of course, it could be that the reference is the owner's bother. Or the owner's next door neighbor. That's why it is important to predefine the parameters.

It may not seem important. But hiring an illegal contractor can cause serious legal and financial problems. Of course, an illegal contractor is typically cheaper than a legal contractor. But the reality is that no one is really saving any money. Because the penalty for hiring an illegal contractor can cost much more than just hiring the legal contractor in the first place.

(this article was written by Ron Holt of Two Maids & A Mop of Pensacola, FL. An independent maid service that seems committed to cleaning up the underground cleaning market. Kudos to this fine company and their commitment to excellence!)