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## **Unregistered Home Improvement Contractors Identified on Craigslis by Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs**

*Check in western and central Massachusetts finds online  
advertising missing mandatory registration information*

BOSTON – September 15, 2011 – A Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) review of Craigslis advertising for contractors found at least seven contractors posting ads were unregistered, and dozens more who did not include their registration number in their advertisements, which is mandated by state regulation.

The survey was conducted in response to concerns that homeowners affected by the June 1 tornadoes in western and central Massachusetts may be taken advantage of by unscrupulous home improvement contractors. Following wide-scale natural disasters, unregistered contractors have been known to enter regions soliciting work. The review was completed before the impact of Tropical Storm Irene.

“This review found numerous unregistered contractors and dozens of ads that do not list a contractor’s registration number, and that should be an immediate red flag to the consumer,” said Barbara Anthony, Undersecretary of the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation. “Using unregistered contractors leaves homeowners without many of the consumer protections they maintain if they use a registered contractor. For example, such consumers are not eligible for up to \$10,000 in restitution from the state’s Guaranty Fund.”

The review found many advertisements lacking a contractor’s registration number from the OCA home improvement contractor program. All advertising by home improvement contractors must include a registration number, as consumers who use unregistered contractors have little state protection from unscrupulous practices.

From July 1 to July 25, 2011, OCA surveyed all Craigslis ads posted under central and western Massachusetts listings offering home improvement work. The check found 44 ads without

registration numbers, and staff responded to all of those ads as homeowners from Brimfield requesting house repairs.

In more than half of the cases, the advertisers did not return phone calls, and the ads were missing so much information that OCA could no longer pursue the contractor. OCA found nine registered home improvement contractors improperly advertising on Craigslist, and six home improvement contractors operating without registrations, including two who visited the Brimfield house where they learned that the meeting was part of an enforcement action by OCA.

OCA sent letters to the contractors caught in this action requesting that they register as home improvement contractors and change their advertisements to adhere with the law. OCA will follow up with these contractors and take appropriate action as needed, including requesting a hearing that could result in fines of \$2,000 per violation, suspension, or revocation of a registration.

Consumers who are planning on hiring a home improvement contractor should consider the following tips to make sure they are using a qualified person for a job:

- Make sure any advertising includes a registration number. If there is no registration number in the advertisement, request the information immediately.
- Check for the home improvement contractor's registration at [www.mass.gov/consumer](http://www.mass.gov/consumer). The history will include any disciplinary actions against the contractor.
- If the contractor demands cash as payment and nothing else, this could be a sign they are skirting the rules.
- Get a reference from family or friends, but still take the time to check the contractor's background.
- Do not pay more than one-third as a down payment, and make sure the contract includes a clear timeline and payment schedule, with the final payment due after the work is fully completed and inspected.

Consumers who are approached by a crew or individual offering services without a home improvement contractor registration should contact the Office of Consumer Affairs Consumer Hotline at (888) 283-3757, and should also call that number if they have any further questions about a contractor's status.

The Patrick-Murray Administration's Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation is committed to protecting consumers through consumer advocacy and education, and also works to ensure that the businesses its agencies regulate treat all Massachusetts consumers fairly. Follow the Office at its blog, [Consumer Connections](#), and on Twitter, [@Mass\\_Consumer](#).

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