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Contractors State License Board Urges Napa Earthquake Victims to Only Hire Licensed Contractors for Repairs

Those caught contracting without a state license could face felony charges and prison time

SACRAMENTO – The [Contractors State License Board](http://www.cslb.ca.gov) (CSLB) is urging residents of Napa Valley and surrounding areas to only hire California-licensed contractors if they experienced damage to their homes, outbuildings, or businesses following this morning's 6.1 magnitude earthquake and subsequent aftershocks.

“Unfortunately, unlicensed—and sometimes unscrupulous—people show up shortly after natural disasters and try to take advantage of victims at a vulnerable time,” said CSLB Registrar Steve Sands. “Now, more than ever, homeowners need to be cautious about hiring reputable people to repair their property. It only takes a few minutes to check the status of a contractor license on CSLB’s Web site or by calling our toll-free telephone system.”

By checking CSLB’s Web site, www.cslb.ca.gov or CheckTheLicenseFirst.com, or by calling CSLB’s automated assistance line at 1-800-321-CSLB (2752), property owners can find the licensing background of their contractor and have access to publications and videos that explain consumer rights and best practices when hiring a contractor. This includes post-earthquake work ranging from repairing damaged homes and buildings, debris removal, hot water heater replacement, and mobile homes that have shifted off their support systems. Starting Monday morning, CSLB’s special Disaster Hotline will be staffed Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. at 1-800-962-1125.

“After going through the fear and then the ordeal of property damage after these earthquakes, the last thing people need is to be victimized a second time by unlicensed or unscrupulous scammers,” said

Sands. “Unlicensed contractors should know that they could face felony charges if they’re caught contracting in this [disaster area](#).” Punishment for a felony charge may include up to 16 months in state prison, and a fine of up to \$10,000 ([Business & Professions Code 7028.16](#)).

Sweep and undercover enforcement operations are already being planned in the quake-affected areas in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma counties. In addition to the potential felony charge, misdemeanor charges are also possible. Those carry up to \$5,000 in penalties and/or up to 90 days in county jail. Subsequent convictions carry even stronger penalties, including a mandatory 90 days in jail.

CSLB licensees have a minimum of four years of journey-level experience in the trade for which they are licensed, and have passed tests related to their craft and California contracting law. CSLB licensees are also required to have workers’ compensation insurance for employees (and themselves if they are Roofing (C-39) contractors) to ensure the homeowner is not financially liable in the event of a work-related injury on their property.

Earthquake victims can verify the status of a contractor’s license on the CSLB Web site: www.cslb.ca.gov or www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com or by calling the toll-free automated line: 800-321-CSLB (2752). Helpful publications in English and Spanish and other languages can be ordered or downloaded from the Web site, such as *What You Should Know Before Hiring a Contractor*, with tips on hiring and working with home improvement contractors, and *After a Disaster, Don’t Get Scammed*. CSLB’s video *Rebuilding After a Natural Disaster*, is also available for viewing in the *Disaster Help Center* on [CSLB’s Web site](#).

CSLB urges you to follow these guidelines before hiring a contractor:

- Don’t hire the first contractor who comes along;
- Don’t rush into repairs, no matter how badly they’re needed;
- Hire only licensed contractors and ask to see their license and a photo ID to ensure they are who they say they are;
- Always check the license number on CSLB’s Web site at www.cslb.ca.gov or [CheckTheLicenseFirst.com](http://www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com), and contact the business directly if you have any questions;
- Don’t pay more than 10 percent or \$1,000, whichever is less, as a down payment. There is an exception for about two dozen licensees who carry special bonds to protect consumers. These exceptions are noted on CSLB’s Web site;
- Don’t pay in cash, and don’t let payments get ahead of the work; and
- Get at least three bids, check references, and get a written contract

CSLB also reminds residents to make sure their contractor gets all the necessary permits and required inspections from city or county building department for any construction, reconstruction, or installation of air conditioners, heaters, or water heaters.

The Contractors State License Board operates under the umbrella of the [California Department of Consumer Affairs](#). More information and publications about hiring contractors are available on CSLB's website or by calling (800) 321-CSLB (2752). You also can sign up for CSLB [email alerts](#). CSLB licenses and regulates almost 290,000 contractors in California, and is regarded as one of the leading consumer protection agencies in the United States. In fiscal year 2013-14, CSLB helped recover nearly \$51 million in ordered restitution for consumers.

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