

## **Tips for Hiring an HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) Contractor**

When identifying a number of contractors from whom to seek bids, the following tips can be helpful:

- Ask friends and neighbors to recommend contractors with whom they have had a good experience.
- Check with the Concord Public Library Reference Desk regarding access to services that rate local contractors based on customer satisfaction level.
- Consider subscribing to a local listserv such as the Concord Discussion List, and ask the other subscribers to recommend contractors with whom they've had a good experience. Go to <http://www.concordma.com/list.html> for instructions on joining the Concord Discussion List.

When requesting proposals from contractors, and evaluating their proposals, the following tips can be helpful:

- Consider using the Residential HVAC Quality Installation Check List compiled by the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) to evaluate potential contractors. It can be found at <http://www.acca.org/Files/?id=186>. It is based upon an HVAC Quality Installation Specification developed by a task force consisting of contractors, utility energy efficiency program administrators, equipment manufacturers, and trade and environmental organizations. The Specification is intended to help homeowners identify good contractor practices and to ensure that a quality installation is done in their home. You can download the specification here: <https://www.acca.org/Files/?id=693>
- One of the suggestions in the Quality Installation Checklist is to ensure that potential contractors have the proper licenses. In Massachusetts, there is no HVAC contractor license. However, your contractor may need to have one or more state licenses to complete your project. The relevant licenses are issued by one of two state agencies:
  - *Licenses issued by the MA Dept. of Public Safety*
    - Pipefitter's License
    - Refrigeration Technician's License (if the air conditioning system being installed is 10 tons or more – very unlikely for a residence)
    - Oil Burner Technician's License
  - *Licenses issued by the MA Executive Office of Consumer Affairs, Division of Professional Licensure*
    - Plumbing and Gas Fitter's License
    - Electrician's License

- Sheet Metal License (mandatory if your contractor is going to be installing more than 3 feet of air ducts.)
- Complaints or Disciplinary Actions. If a contractor has one of the licenses listed above, you can check to see if they have any complaints or disciplinary actions on their record.
  - For licenses issued by the MA Executive Office of Consumer Affairs, Division of Professional Licensure, go to <http://license.reg.state.ma.us/public/licque.asp?color=blue>. Enter the information that you have about the contractor. Entering the contractor's license number may be the easiest way to find their record.
  - For licenses issued by the Department of Public Safety, go to <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/agencies/dps/dps-license-lookup.html>.
  - You may also call the relevant state department and ask them to check the licensed contractor's record for complaints or disciplinary actions. Call the MA Executive Office of Consumer Affairs, Division of Professional Licensure at (617) 727-3074 and the Department of Public Safety at (617) 727-3200. Press 4 to transfer to departments within the Department of Public Safety. Press 6 for engineering inquiries.
- Another suggestion in the Quality Installation Checklist is to ensure that potential contractors have liability insurance. State insurance requirements vary depending on the contractor's incorporation status and type of license. If there is no insurance requirement, you may wish to ensure that the contractor has voluntarily acquired liability insurance. If the contractor has liability insurance, they should be able to provide you with a copy of their insurance certificate.
  - Any firm that is incorporated and seeks a license from the Division of Professional Licensure must also apply for a business license from the relevant state licensing board within the Division of Professional Licensure. In order to get a business license, they must prove that they have liability insurance, although there is no minimum amount required. A firm decides how much liability insurance to carry based on the type and amount of work they do.
  - A firm (or individual) that is not incorporated does not have to get a business license in order to get a trade license from the Plumbing, Electrical or Sheet Metal Boards within the Division of Professional Licensure, and so they are not required to have any liability insurance.
  - Pipefitters, refrigeration technicians and oil burner technicians are not required to have liability insurance in order to get licenses from the Department of Public Safety.
- Obtain three bids from contractors for the HVAC work to be done, and get thorough estimates in writing with detailed specifications. You can then do a better comparison of prices and differences or similarities in the proposed scope of work.

- Ask each contractor for a list of references and call them.
- There are federal tax credits that can be taken for energy efficient HVAC equipment installed in your home. If you intend to claim the federal tax credit, you will need to ask the contractor to provide you with a Manufacturer's Certification Statement (available on manufacturers' websites) certifying that the equipment he/she intends to install in your home qualifies for the tax credit.

Once you've selected a contractor, and are ready to sign a contract, the following tips can be helpful.

- Make sure all terms, conditions, warranties and oral promises (including beginning and completion dates) are included in your contract.
- Do not sign a contract until you have read and understand all terms, provisions and notices. Do not sign an agreement unless it is completely filled out.
- Obtain and keep a copy of all written documents, including contracts and receipts from others providing materials to your project, including suppliers.
- Consumer Protection Laws in Massachusetts allow you to cancel your contract within three days if you signed the agreement in your home, or at a place other than the contractor's office or business. Do not hesitate to exercise this right if you are not completely satisfied with the contract.

Once work has begun, the following tips can be helpful.

- Do not pay for the entire job in advance or make scheduled payments before the agreed upon terms are met and the work is completed to your full satisfaction.
- Never sign a Certificate of Completion until the work is thoroughly and properly completed according to the specifications and time line within the contract.

These suggestions have been prepared by the Concord Municipal Light Plant (CMLP). CMLP does not guarantee the accuracy of the information provided herein. These suggestions are not intended as legal advice, and CMLP is not liable for any outcomes resulting from their use.