

HEAD OFFICE

4 Carnavon Street
Private Mail Bag
GPO, Suva
Phone - General Office: 3300792, 3310183
Chief Executive Officer: 3305864
Fax: 3300115 | Email: complaints@consumersfiji.org

LAUTOKA/West

Suite 4 Popular Building
Vidilo Street
PO Box 5396, Lautoka
Phone: 6664987 | Fax: 6652846
Email: consumerltk@connect.com.fj

LABASA/North

Level 1, Lot 41 Raza Properties Ltd
Nasekula Road
PO Box 64, Labasa
Phone: 8812559 | Fax: 8812559
Email: colbs@connect.com.fj

20 June 2015

FEATURE

Delays, Delays and Delays!

Building a house is not easy as it has a fair share of glitches. In some cases, it can become a stressful experience laden with problems especially if you hire unknowingly some unscrupulous construction company.

Despite having entered contracts, some consumers are given a run-around by the construction companies. There are unwarranted delays in the completion of the house, shoddy work, overcharging, wrong material are used and in worse cases, they just disappear with the money paid to them as down payments.

The quality of workmanship is being compromised because contractors are rushing work in order to get to the next job. While it is normal for builders and subcontractors to be involved on more than one job at the same time, if they are overcommitted they risk compromising quality in the rush to get things done quickly.

Over the years, the Council has come across a number of complaints against construction companies and tradesmen such as carpenters, joiners, plumbers and tile-layers have failed to deliver their services as per the contract.

A pressing concern reflected in these complaints relate to total disregard of 'commitment and professionalism' among some construction companies and individual tradesmen. They do not value 'time' and the 'work schedule', the two parties agreed upon. A number of them do not keep their words and they fail to honour their obligations as a service provider by meeting the deadline for the completion of the work.

In one case at hand, a construction company was paid \$30,000 by an elderly consumer who hired them to build his house. But to this consumer's dismay, the construction company folded their operations without fulfilling their obligation. They only laid the foundation of the house, leaving the retired consumer \$30,000 poorer.

In another case, a consumer had paid a joinery company \$5,000 to install a mega kitchen cabinet after identifying this particular company in a newspaper advertisement. After paying the agreed sum of money, the agent for the joinery company disappeared. All phone lines were disconnected and he could not be reached. The distressed consumer lost not just his money but time in trying to contact the agent.

A number of other consumers have suffered similar fate with some joiners. Either the work they had hired the joiners for were incomplete or the finished work did not match what was initially agreed upon.

A scrutiny in this area shows that the problem seems to be made worse by lack of qualified tradesmen, which means builders have to hire less skilled tradesmen. Since 2010 to 31 March 2015, the Council had received 62 complaints against construction companies and tradesmen.

Those consumers planning to hire the services of the construction companies or individual tradesperson must ensure there is a written agreement detailing the scope of work and the cost.

If new work comes up, you must discuss with your contractor not only what needs to be done but also how much will it cost. You must approve and sign a change to the contract, including a new estimate. If you are doing major renovation work, it's best to engage a lawyer and get them to go over your contract, explain it to you and advise you on what is covered in the contract.

Some tips:

- ask for recommendations from friends and neighbours about good reliable construction companies and sound and sensible agreements with them
- make a list of exactly what you want done. Remember that changing plans in the middle of a project will cost extra money
- set a clear budget
- consider dealing with a local company. This may make it easier to check references, enforce a warranty and/or have follow-up work done
- never accept an estimate over the phone or without the contractor inspecting the area
- formalise all verbal agreements in writing
- check the company you have shortlisted by visiting the Consumer Council of Fiji to establish whether complaints were lodged against this company and the nature of complaint.