



Word Count: 307
(Including title)

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Keeping the Cost of Going Green within Your Budget

If you're thinking about installing energy efficient or sustainable products, make sure your conservation efforts don't turn into a costly lesson.

Repairing or replacing windows, floors, a roof, heating and cooling unit, plumbing fixtures, adding a solar energy system or other household energy busters always should be performed by state-licensed professionals—especially if you're on a fixed income. Hiring a reputable, licensed contractor whose performance is guided by California construction laws and standards will help ensure that the job is done right the first time.

Before contracts are signed or work begins, always make sure you check your contractor on the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) website www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com or www.cslb.ca.gov, or by calling CSLB's toll-free automated telephone system at (800) 321-CSLB (2752).

Remember these helpful tips before you begin your home's energy conservation project:

1. Only hire state-licensed contractors.
2. Check the contractor license number at www.CheckTheLicenseFirst.com, www.cslb.ca.gov or by calling (800) 321-CSLB (2752).
3. Get at least three bids, three references from each bidder, and review past work in person.
4. Make sure all project expectations are in writing and detailed.
5. If the contract is being negotiated by a contractor's representative, make sure that person is a state-registered [home improvement salesperson](#) and can legally act on behalf of the contractor.
6. Only sign the contract if you completely understand the terms.
7. Don't pay in cash; and never pay more than 10 percent down or \$1,000, whichever is less, unless the contractor has a blanket performance and payment bond on file with CSLB.
8. Don't let payments get ahead of the work.
9. Keep a job file of photos and all papers relating to your project, including all payments.
10. Don't make the final payment until you are satisfied that the job meets all contract expectations.

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