

Sunday, 24th May 2009

BATHROOM RENOVATION DISASTERS

South Australians are being warned about the prevalence of botched bathroom renovations by unlicensed tradespeople, leaving householders to pick up the pieces.

Minister for Consumer Affairs Gail Gago says there have been 47 complaints to the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) about bathroom renovations over the last two years.

“It’s disturbing to hear the extent of bathroom renovation disasters,” says Minister Gago.

“Consumers are being left with unfinished work, absolutely appalling workmanship and expensive repair bills because unlicensed contractors are just not doing the work properly.

“Some bathroom renovations have been so bad they’ve had to be completely redone and other rooms have needed repairs from major water damage.”

OCBA has become aware of the extent of the unlicensed contracting through reports from consumers, SA Water and also through its own monitoring and investigations. Problems include:

- Substandard work (particularly plumbing, tiling and water proofing);
- Projects taking substantially longer to complete;
- Defective goods installed (such as vanity units, baths and shower screens);
- Builders and tradespeople being reluctant to rectify faulty work.

Consumers are reminded to check that a tradesperson is licensed to carry out a particular type of work before hiring them.

“A whole lot of heartache can be avoided by hiring someone who is licensed and capable of carrying out the work,” says the Minister.

“Clearly there are some tradespeople out there who don’t know what they’re doing when it comes to bathroom renovations and these people shouldn’t be tackling work they’re not licensed to do.

“In the majority of cases we are able to catch up with these cowboys before they get the chance to make a mess of consumer’s homes.”

Since January 2008 OCBA has dealt with 431 unlicensed builders and 89 unlicensed plumbers and gasfitters (53 of these were unlicensed bathroom contractors).

These tradespeople have been stopped in their tracks with hundreds of warning letters sent and 18 giving written assurances to the Commissioner that they will refrain from performing such work without being registered. Breaching an assurance carries a maximum penalty of \$5,000 on top of prosecution for the unlicensed work. The penalty of unlicensed contracting is up to \$20,000.

Court actions determined in the past 18 months that arose from bathroom renovations include:

- \$4,000 fine for unlicensed building and plumbing activity (Nov '07)
- \$7,500 fine and conviction for unlicensed building activity and performing unregistered plumbing and electrical work (Oct '08)
- \$5,750 fine and conviction for unlicensed builder (Mar '09)
- \$2,000 fine for unregistered plumbing work, failing to take out indemnity insurance and demanding excessive deposit (Mar '09).

Consumers can visit OCBA's Licensing Public Register at www.ocba.sa.gov.au/licensing to find a licensed tradesperson or should check the back of a person's licence card to see what they are licensed to do before hiring them.