

# Don't get burned by fly-by-night paving contractors

How big was it? is a question usually reserved for a fishing story about "the one that got away." But one of the coldest winters on record has taken such a toll on Ontario roads that this spring people are trading yarns about the size of the potholes.

If the potholes, cracks and buckling in your driveway are making you think about repaving, take a tip from Ontario's Consumer Ministry. Hiring the right paving company can help make sure new problems don't surface shortly after the work's been done.

"The ministry's Consumer Services Bureaus receive a lot of complaints about poor residential paving jobs" says Marilyn Gurevsky, a bureau manager. "Many of these come from householders who've expected too much from inexpensive jobs."

#### You get what you pay for

Gurevsky says companies that offer a much lower price than the competition may use inferior materials or skimp on proper installation techniques. While a warranty will probably be offered with the paving, it may be useless if the company can't be found or goes out of business.

The ministry advises consumers to be especially wary of companies selling paving services door-to-door. Some legitimate companies may solicit work in a neighborhood if they have a few jobs there already.

Gurevsky says bureau staff hear some complaints from people who've dealt with reputable firms, paid fair prices and still received poor results. She says these are usually the easiest complaints to resolve, because the companies will honor their warranties to protect their good reputations.

"But some complaints, which often have to do with companies selling door-to-door, come from people who've truly been taken by fly-by-night companies," Gurevsky says.

More consumers report they're sat-

isfied with work done by paving firms they've found on their own or through references from friends rather than by companies that happen to be working on their street that week.

#### Guidelines

To help consumers avoid difficulties with residential paving jobs, the ministry offers the following tips:

- ✓ Always get a contract in writing that includes the following:

- ✓ The name and address of the contractor — many consumers find they get good service when they deal with local firms. If repairs are needed and the company's equipment is 500 kilometres away, you may have trouble enforcing the warranty.

- ✓ Details of the job must be listed. Whether the work to be done is simple resurfacing or includes digging out existing work to ground level, make sure it's fully described in writing.

- ✓ The quality and quantity of materials to be used and the final compacted depth of the pavement should be clearly set out.

- ✓ Get a written estimate including the work involved, amounts and quantities of materials to be used and the size of the area to be paved.

- ✓ Call two other paving companies and ask for quotes based on the same specifications.

- ✓ Ask the contractor for references from last year's customers and recent ones, and contact a couple of each. Most problems will surface within a year after the work is done, so if a driveway laid last June is still in good shape, chances are it'll last. Calling a recent client will let you know if the company is keeping up customer service.

- ✓ Ask about the warranty and make sure it is clearly spelled out in writing. Most reputable companies offer one-year warranties.

- ✓ Expect to be asked some ques-

tions. The paving company should want to know if any heavy vehicles will be parked on the driveway, and how old the house is. Owners of new homes are often advised not to have driveways paved until two years after construction, to give the ground time

to settle.

✓ If a company asks for a very large deposit or the price is very low, find another paver. Fly-by-night operators have sometimes been known to disappear with the cash.

For more specific details on resi-

dential driveway paving write for a free copy of the brochure *A Practical Guide to Home Repairs*. It's available from Communications Branch, Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, 250 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 2N5.

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