

## Reader Feedback

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# Letters

## **"RHODE ISLAND MULLS CONTRACTOR EDUCATION REQUIREMENT," BY TED CUSHMAN (ONLINE, 7/22/14)**

Every time a homeowner gets taken by a contractor here in RI the local media paint the regulations as the problem. Rhode Island actually has some of the toughest contractor regulations in the country. Unfortunately, by the time a shady contractor gets caught, he/she has already defrauded several other owners, and the media and politicians call for more regulations.

Rhode Island doesn't have a license procedure yet for general contractors but, unlike most states, everyone who does work in a house must be registered with the Contractors Registration and Licensing Board (CRLB)—painters, tile setters, drapery hangers, siding installers, masons, roofers, gutter installers, framers, drywall hangers, flooring installers, garage door installers, window washers .... Some tradespeople, such as plumbers and electricians, must be licensed, so they don't need a separate registration (unless they act as a general contractor or do other work on a house).

A contractor can't hide behind a business entity to avoid responsibility for fraud or shoddy work because of the way the registration law is written—he is still personally responsible:

"A partnership, corporation, or joint venture may do work, offer to do work, or submit a bid to perform work only if registered. In the case of registration by a corporation or partnership, an individual shall be designated to be responsible for the work performed. The corporation or partnership and its designee shall be jointly and severally liable for any fees and violations."

Even big-box stores that offer home services here in Rhode Island have individuals at those corporations (and you can get their names and contact info in 30 seconds at [crb.ri.gov](http://crb.ri.gov)) who are personally on the hook for any work done in RI by the companies, and work the companies subcontract out.

And anyone who tries to thwart the registration process so a person whose regis-

tration has been suspended or revoked can work is subject to a \$10,000 fine and/or a year in jail:

"No person shall register as a contractor with the contractors' registration board for the purpose of deceiving or circumventing the registration process by enabling a person whose registration has been suspended or revoked to conduct business. Violators of this section shall be jointly and individually liable for damages resulting from their activities as contractors pursuant to this chapter. Violations of this subsection may result in a revocation of registration and/or fines not to exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) and/or up to one year in jail. Furthermore, the director shall require that all applicants for registration shall swear by way of affidavit that they are aware of this provision and its implications."

Rhode Island law has required that registered contractors obtain continuing education since 2008, but it hasn't been enforced since it required rules and regs to implement. I sat on an ad-hoc committee a few years ago that drafted up the rules and regs for continuing education. We've just been waiting for the state and CRLB to get their internal systems up to speed to handle an anticipated 25,000 hours of continuing education reported each year statewide; and for the rules and regs to be blessed by the state. Both steps are just months away.

Continuing education and licensing won't stop crooks. Unfortunately, when they strike, it reflects poorly on all of the good contractors.

## **"MUDSILL LAYOUT FOR A COMPLEX FOUNDATION," BY MATT ANDERSON (MAY/14)**

What brand and type of bolts does Anderson use to fasten sills to the foundation?

**JLC editors respond:** To permanently attach the sills, Anderson uses  $\frac{3}{4}$ -by-8-inch Titen bolts made by Simpson Strong-Tie. The information about installing them is in the follow-up article, "First-Floor Deck for a Complex Foundation," in the July issue of *JLC*.

# Drive

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says, no, just weatherstrip the windows; you'll save a little less, but you will save some and it won't cost so much. (That's maybe you, advocating the easy out.) A third comes along and says that all the work on the window is nothing compared with all the air leaks in your attic that have turned your house into a complete energy hog. Adams is most like that third contractor.

If you want the car analogy to work, it's like some snake-oil salesman selling the driver of the Suburban a little device to install on his fuel line that will turn his vehicle into a Prius ... only it won't. And it takes real global energy to produce the new windows and the weather-stripping or the thermostats and the tubes of caulk. Real energy that's wasted because it's not solving the real problems. Focusing on little energy saving tips is a ruse—just feel-good pabulum that lulls people into thinking that they're saving real energy when they are actually ignoring substantial energy problems. When people are lulled into thinking they are doing good, they quit striving for making a real difference. So the tips actually hurt. That's what this article is about.

### **"SPRINKLER MANDATE DEBATED" (JLC ONLINE, 8/7/14)**

**Michael McGee:** Good ... put them in. Just don't force it down our throats. Give the buyer a choice. Here in northern Illinois, the cost for a sprinkler system hasn't been under \$10,000. Most have been around \$15,000 for a 3,000-square-foot home. Homeowners insurance goes up, not down, because of the extra piping added to the cost of the house. There is the monthly monitoring fee; the cost for when the fire department responds to a false alarm every time the water pressure drops; and on and on. Give the home buyer a choice. Municipalities here are starting to do that.

**Whoever:** This should *not* be a one-fits-all: We built a log home in '09 and were forced to install interior sprinkler systems ... so the "light-weight" material argument does not apply in our case. As we are in a wildland area, I would rather have spent the money on exterior sprinklers.

**Robert Jordan:** When airbags were mandated, the car companies said they

would never sell another car because of the cost. Now, carmakers boast about how many airbags they have. Seat belts were the same.

The National Association of Home Builders fights *everything* that is mandated and increases the cost of a house. With any proposed increase in insulation or energy upgrades, NAHB fights tooth and nail. They "prove" it isn't cost-effective, doesn't save lives, yada, yada, yada. I would like to see what NAHB's position was on insulation circa 1950 when insulation was starting to be installed. Imagine telling a consumer today that you could save them \$5,000 by leaving out the insulation because it isn't really needed. That is what a builder told my father in 1950.

Sprinklers are here and will be mandated soon. With sprinklers, most fires will be put out quickly, causing little damage. I am renovating a duplex for rental. I will put in sprinklers. I will have lower insurance premiums. I won't lose my building if there is a fire. I will be protecting both of my tenants. Uponor is saying it increases the cost of the house by less than 2.5%. If the construction cost of a \$500,000 house is \$250,000, the sprinkler upgrade is \$6,250.

**JLC editor's note:** Uponor, a manufacturer of a residential sprinkler system that uses PEX piping and ties into the domestic cold-water supply, claims the system adds "as little as 1.5%" to the cost of construction.

**Von Salmi:** I recently read an article by the NAHB in which they stated that for every \$1,000 increase in mandated code requirements, the home buying market loses some 260,000 potential buyers by disqualification. [See "State and Metro Area House Prices: The Priced-Out Effect," NAHB.org, 8/1/14.] In lieu of reacting in a knee-jerk fashion, maybe all parties should convene to address ways to develop safer, more value-oriented solutions to all of these issues. Protecting lives and providing more opportunities for home ownership should be the goal.

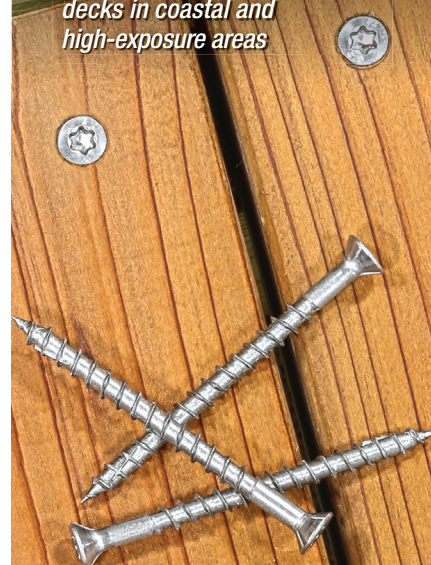
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