Builder: Lack of permits puts homeowners at risk

BY BRETT MCLAUGHLIN
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WALHALLA — At least one local building contractor is taking issue with the fact that Oconee County is not enforcing its permitting policy.

Tim Marchbanks of Total Home Exteriors said he drove from Anderson to Walhalla last month to get a permit for a roofing job only to be informed he no longer needed a permit for that work.

"At first, I thought this would take a lot of aggravation off our plates, but instantly, I realized that this is a huge problem. If no permits are needed, this opens the door for the 'fly-by-nighters' to come into Oconee County by the herds, including illegals," Marchbanks said.

Oconee Building Codes Director Channon Chambers said that, technically, permits are required but that his office has never enforced roofing permits due to lack of manpower and technology.

"For a normal reroof, we do not require a permit," Chambers said. "We can't facilitate them in a timely manner, and it doesn't make a whole lot of sense for a $1,000 or even a $5,000 job."

Chambers said that his office has been requesting the county implement technology that would allow contractors to get permits online, eliminating what he said can be a two to three hour investment in time by builders living in the southern part of the county who would have to travel to Walhalla for a $50 permit.

"The profit is minimal to begin with," he said. "We're just not real interested in enforcing that until we have the mechanism to do it."

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> **Tim Marchbanks**
> Owner, Total Home Exteriors

As far as Marchbanks is concerned, the lack of permitting opens the door to unlicensed, unbonded builders who will take advantage of homeowners.

"I don't have a problem with competition," Marchbanks said. "I could never do all of the exterior work in the Upstate by myself. However, it is very difficult to compete in pricing against these guys, and unfortunately, a lot of times when the taillights leave the homeowner's driveway, their warranty is also disappearing in the distance."

South Carolina requires that a company must be licensed and bonded when the cost of a roof exceeds $5,000.

While this applies to nearly 80 percent of all roofs, Marchbanks said he sees men that are not licensed and bonded working on roofs every day.

Chambers admits that unlicensed builders are operating in the area. Sometimes they are locals, and other times, they are simply "gypsies" that are moving through the area.

"What good are laws if they are not enforced?" Marchbanks said.

"I'm not totally blaming the county for these issues. It is the responsibility of the homeowner, while getting estimates, to check out their contractor by obtaining proof of insurance, license and bond and also by checking them out with the Better Business Bureau, before signing a contract."

brett@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6680