

# Buyer's Guide

## Choosing the Right Paving Contractor



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Driveway paving is a very competitive business. There are a lot of contractors out there that want to re-pave your driveway and unfortunately, not all of them should be in this business. Many are reputable, however. Here's how to find one, and how to get a great job that will last for years.

### Why pave the driveway?

Homeowners usually decide to re-pave their driveways for the same reasons. New driveways correct old problems, add curb appeal (great for when the house is going up for sale) and in the end, add value to the property itself.

The decision to pave the driveway should be made carefully and with a bit of research, not because somebody rang the doorbell and offered a "great deal". Hopefully, this guide will help a bit.

The person or company you choose to pave your driveway is called a "contractor". Contractors are businesses. They may own their equipment and pave locally, or they may simply be salesmen who sign up clients then call in a paving company to complete the work.

Your best choice is a local company that owns its own equipment. Local paving contractors have reputations to uphold and they have to live and do business in your town. They are your first choice.

Some contractors actually do own their own equipment and may park it on your street to point that out. These are usually the ones that ring your doorbell and ask to pave your driveway. That all seems fine until you realize that this enterprising contractor is not only from out of town, he's from out of province! Alberta winters are too cold to pave, so these contractors do the next best thing: they tow their equipment to warmer British Columbia, filling the quiet winter months paving local driveways and leaving when the weather warms up back home.

As we've said, many contractors are legit and have their own reputations to uphold in their own towns, but if they aren't local and they aren't much cheaper then they aren't your first choice.

Mike Holmes ("Holmes on Homes") is not a fan of doorbell-ringing contractors at all, especially the ones that offer "today only" specials. Low prices usually are masking financial desperation. Say "no thank you" and close the door gently.

**Next Step: Research the Contractor...**

## **Researching a Chosen Contractor**

You've chosen what you think might be the right contractor and he's ready to give you an estimate. Now it's time to see who he really is. Call (or go online) the Better Business Bureau. The BBB in Vancouver is at <http://mainlandbc.bbb.org> and their phone number is 604-682-2711.

Not all contractors are BBB accredited. Joining the Better Business Bureau is not easy. You have to prove how long you've been in business and there are hefty fees involved. The BBB will still give you a rating, and that rating will be based on some 16 different criteria, including complaints. You can't help getting complaints, but you have to prove that you can settle them quickly and amicably.

If your contractor is local and has an A or A+ rating, BBB member or not, you are doing well so far.

## **Getting an Estimate**

In all instances, you want to get at least two estimates before handing over money. Since there is a lot more to an estimate than just the price, we thought we'd give you some tips to show your contractor that you are at somewhat savvy:

## **Explain what you have in mind**

Explain what exactly you think you need and expect for your new driveway. Length multiplied by width equals square footage and that is how your driveway will be estimated. In addition, there may be extra cost if preparation or excavation is required to create a good solid base for

the asphalt . Make sure you get a written quote explaining what exactly you will be having done.

### **2 ½” inches, or 2 ½” inches? Know the difference!**

The industry standard for an asphalt driveway's thickness is 2" to 2 1/2" after compaction. This part is really important because it is a favourite way for lesser contractors to save a little money for themselves.

If you are being quoted for 2 ½” inches of asphalt, make sure that the contractor understands (and puts in writing) that he’s giving you 2 ½” inches **after he’s compacted it**. Asphalt goes on and has to be compacted or squashed down to make sure that it can withstand the years of use that a driveway gets. The contractor may have to put down 3 ½” inches to get to the right thickness after compaction. That may cause the estimate to look a little higher---make sure you ask. A 2 ½” inch driveway may end up losing an inch after it’s compacted, and that just isn’t going to work. You’ll get a nasty surprise six months later, and that lowball estimate won’t seem like such a good deal anymore. Weeds and cracking will be the least of your worries.

Finally, take a drive, and look at some driveways the contractor has done. If he won’t share addresses, you’ve both got a little problem. Pass him by.