

Consumer Affairs

The 'Great Wooden Floor Swindle'

If you are thinking of having a wooden floor laid in your house take care! The demand for solid wood, or composite wood flooring (where a thin layer of expensive wood, like oak, is bonded to cheaper planks) has never been higher. Unfortunately, there are plenty of unscrupulous dealers out there ready to rip you off as my husband and I found out, to our cost, last year.

We wanted a solid oak floor in our sitting room, so looked through Yellow Pages and called a few companies out to quote. By chance, someone working on our house recommended the The Timber Flooring Company (UK) Ltd and gave me a business card. I called and spoke to an Adrian Andrews who said he was in the area and could come round to quote that afternoon. He had all the patter, all the charm, came up with a competitive quote and even knocked 10% off because I'd got one of his 'special' calling cards. He left me with a sample of the oak so I could show my husband. He was very slick and nothing was too much trouble.

I should have smelt a rat but, he'd arrived with the company name all over his van and, when I accepted the quote, sent me a confirmation letter on headed paper, followed by a very official-looking contract. He phoned a few times to badger me, but I just thought he was keen. As agreed, I returned the signed contract with a cheque for 50% to be put towards the purchase of the wood - a cool £1,300.

A few days before the agreed installation date I called Mr Andrew's mobile number to check he'd be there on Monday as agreed. Oh yes, he said. No problem. But on the Monday he didn't show. On Tuesday again he didn't turn up and his office didn't respond to my numerous telephone messages. It was the same story on Wednesday. Finally, on Thursday night, my husband called the mobile number and caught Andrews off guard, clearly

in the pub. He said he'd 'left the company', but we were not to worry, 'everything was in hand and they'd be in touch'.

I kept phoning, but weeks went by and my messages and letters went unanswered. My husband visited the office address but there was no one there. Mr Andrews kept answering his mobile, playing the innocent and revealing a little more each time. The company 'owed him money' he said. It was nothing to do with him, but the company was in trouble and there were several other people, like us, who'd paid their deposits but were yet to see their floors.

The law continues to allow companies to shut down, claiming insolvency one day, only to start up the next day under a different company name. We started to think that this was another example. We contacted the Trading Standards Authority and spoke to solicitors but were advised to just let it go. The Timber Flooring Company (UK) Ltd. was subject to a compulsory liquidation order in August last year nine months after our encounter with them.

So here we are, a year later, £1,300 poorer, and very bitter. We did, finally, get our oak floor laid by a company called PDH Contracts, who were willing to accept our deposit cheque once the planks were over our threshold. Please, learn by our mistake:-

- * Only talk to a company recommended by someone you TRUST
- * Insist on paying any deposit by credit card (because if the company goes under you may be covered), or offer to pay the deposit only on delivery of the goods
- * Have a really good look at the contract and ensure there is a clause to protect YOU. If it's not there, insist on it being added.

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