



Helpful Consumer Tools & Tips From....

Minnesota Geothermal Heat Pump Association

5 Easy Steps You Can Take to Check a Geothermal Contractor's Credentials...

It's actually easy to find out if a contractor is professionally qualified to perform work for you. Here are a few simple steps you can take...right from your home computer.

1. Check the status of their state mechanical bond

Or, if they even have one!...

Both [Minnesota](#) and [Wisconsin](#) require by law that all mechanical contractors carry a current and valid state bond certificate. This protects you by providing a path for action, including possible compensation, if your contractor turns out to be a bad egg.

MN DOLI Bond & License Lookup:

<https://secure.doli.state.mn.us/lookup/licensing.aspx>

Search—by the name of the company or individual. If the contractor is not listed, it means that they either do not have a bond or it is held by a special third-party holding company under a different name (which could also mean trouble).

If the contractor is listed check-out their bond status:

Issued—means bond is current and in good standing, and a certificate of proof was issued to holder

Expired—means renewal application was not received before expiration date and the holder must reapply for a new bond and number

Pending—means that renewal application and fee were received by expiration date but certificate is pending approval for some reason. This could be something as simple as incomplete application documents...OR...that there is a consumer dispute, surety claim, or enforcement action currently in arbitration with the contractor

Revoked—means that enforcement action has been taken

by the state against the contractor and their bond or license has been revoked. They will have been ordered to cease and desist from performing any more work (or even offering to perform work) in the trade for which the business had been bonded or licensed. This includes by extension any affiliated "also known as" (aka) business concerns.

Every two years, contractors must renew their mechanical bond with documented proof of the following:

- Business & Liability Insurance
- Workers Compensation Insurance
- Surety Bond Continuation Certificate
- Business Active and In Good Standing w/Secretary of State.

WI DOS Credential/License Search:

<https://app.wi.gov/licensesearch>

Select—"Trades Credential/License Advanced Search" then...

Credential/License Type—HVAC Contractor

Credential/License Status—Any

ZIP—5 digits (or partial)

Last or Business Name—Enter and select SEARCH.

Unlike MN, a WI contractor's "Status" is not indicated on the site, only the bond "Expiration" date. And WI bond renewal requires only continuing education credits and a small fee.

Both states issue paper certificates to the holder, but online lookup tends to be more reliable because it eliminates the potential for false or proxy documents.

2. Verify IGSHPA accreditation

The International Ground Source Heat Pump Association (IGSHPA) is the highly recognized research and training arm of the geothermal industry.

IGSHPA training and accreditation is required by many consumer-related entities and professional institutions worldwide.

Almost all electric utilities, for example, require proof that contractors are trained and accredited by IGSHPA before they can offer GSHP rebates to their customers.

Continuing education credits (CEUs) must be fulfilled to renew accreditation and membership every 3 years.

IGSHPA Directory Search:

www.igshpa.okstate.edu/directory

Search with "Accredited Installers..." for company listing and "by name" for individuals. If you find your contractor listed, also view the far right column for additional credentials (key is at top). [Compare this with other contractors you might be looking at.](#)

3. Skip steps 1 & 2 and first go directly to the site of the Minnesota Geothermal Heat Pump Association

Contractors who are members of the Minnesota Geothermal Heat Pump Association (MNGHPA) must already be IGSHPA accredited and submit proof of bond, insurance, and CEUs annually to renew their membership. They must also sign and agree to a strict Code of Ethics.

This doesn't mean that all non-members must not be qualified...only that all MNGHPA members have demonstrated the first most essential proof that they are. It is an effective first line of defense between you and a contractor who might just somehow be unscrupulous and/or legally unqualified to do any work for you.

(If they are not a member, you might want to probe a little further into why. But always remain objective. MNGHPA welcomes all new qualified members!)

MNGHPA Find a Pro:

www.mnghpa.org/find-a-pro/

NOTE: Wisconsin has its own excellent organization with similar contractor requirements at: <http://wisgeo.org/>

Make sure that "Contractor" is selected in the drop-down box for a search by zip code and distance from your location.

4. Check contractor standing with electric utility (for rebate)

If you qualify for a GSHP rebate from your electric service provider, check to see if the contractor is included on their list of qualified installers or GSHP "partners."

You can usually do this online. But a phone call to the utility's designated geo-representative might actually be better, because active contractor status can change and lists can take time to update.

These representatives can be very helpful, although they cannot make any specific contractor recommendations.

5. Search consumer advocacy organization web sites

While not always entirely reliable, searching the sites of consumer advocacy organizations can often reveal, or suggest, an evident pattern of business practice.

Better Business Bureau FREE Search:

<http://www.bbb.org/minnesota/>

In your name search, start by just entering the root company name, such as "ACME" in "ACME Geothermal." Then enter city, state. Search.

If the result displays "View More Alternate Names," click it. If it displays any number of "aka" references, it could mean that the company has had past problems and is now operating under a new or slightly "modified" name.

Now proceed by selecting "Read BBB's Report on this Business." Be especially wary of special alerts.

Good luck in your successful search!

The Minnesota Geothermal Heat Pump Association (MNGHPA) is Minnesota's own exclusive non-profit organization committed to promoting the technical competency and growth of the geothermal heat pump industry, as well as educating the consuming public on the effective uses and benefits of geothermal technology and its specific applications in Minnesota.

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