

How to choose a plumber

What a fair call-out fee looks like, and when the law says you need a licensed plumber

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Plumbing is the trade where the difference between a licensed plumber and someone with a van matters most, because the failures are expensive and mostly invisible. A bad joist shows up as a squeak; a bad connection shows up as a wall.

What it should cost

Expect a call-out fee somewhere between about \$80 and \$160, and an hourly rate beyond that. Many businesses waive the call-out if you proceed with the work - ask, because it is a normal thing to ask and the answer tells you something about how they work.

A standard tap replacement is usually a straightforward job with a modest minimum. Anything involving the hot water system, the main line or a concealed leak is a different category and should be quoted rather than estimated on the phone.

Quotes that are wildly cheaper than the others are usually cheaper for a reason: no licence, no insurance, or a plan to find extra work once they are in.

What the law requires

In Tasmania, plumbing work - water, drainage, gas fitting and roof plumbing - must be done by, or under the supervision of, a licensed plumber. This is not a formality: unlicensed work can void your insurance and must be disclosed when you sell.

Most plumbing work requires a Certificate of Plumbing Compliance. Ask for it. If a tradesperson says it is not needed for your job, they should be able to explain why in a way that makes sense.

Gas fitting is separately licensed. A plumber who is not endorsed for gas cannot legally touch your gas line, and should say so rather than attempt it.

Red flags

Cannot or will not give a licence number.

Prices a concealed job confidently over the phone without seeing it.

Asks for cash and offers no paperwork or certificate.

No insurance.

Suggests skipping the compliance certificate "to save you money".

Will not put the quote in writing.

What good looks like

Gives the licence number without being asked twice.

Talks about the likely cause before the price.

Says plainly when a job needs a compliance certificate and includes it.

Explains what they would do if the job turns out worse than expected.

Turns up when they say they will, and tells you if they cannot.

What to ask

- "What is your licence number?"
- "Is the call-out fee separate from the hourly rate, and is it waived if you do the work?"
- "Will I get a Certificate of Plumbing Compliance for this job?"
- "Is this a fixed quote or an estimate - and what would change the price?"
- "If you open the wall and find something worse, what happens then?"
- "Are you insured, and can you show me?"

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