

The following email was issued to my clients on 3/14/2025:

Subject: Reflection on 2024 Inspections

Dear [Client's Name],

I hope this email finds you well. As we look back on a busy 2024 year and enter the next season of claims, I wanted to take a moment to share some reflections from my inspections over the past year (2024).

Unfortunately, I encountered more deliberate fraudulent insurance claims in 2024 than in all my years combined. There has also been an uptick in less than honest statements from owners and contractors.

This is disheartening to me, as I genuinely like people and want to see claims processed fairly. It has forced me to sharpen my focus even more on the facts, ensuring that I don't become desensitized or hardened by bad apples who have tried to manipulate the system.

In response to this trend, I felt it necessary to add a white paper to my website addressing the importance of truthfulness for property owners and contractors during the claims process. This document outlines the engineer's role in property inspections and emphasizes the value of honesty for all parties involved. It also emphasizes the importance of simple interviews with owners and contractors.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce issues Bulletin 2010-04 on September 17, 2010. It is still applicable today. Contractors are not to be seen as offering representation services. This document is posted to my website as well.

With that said, I want to remind you that you're doing an important job. In my eyes, insurance adjusters that I have worked with, are either

- a) helping those with legitimate claims to receive the funds they rightfully deserve or
- b) protecting the resources from those who would seek to take advantage.

Both roles are vital, and I appreciate your ongoing dedication to integrity in the claims process.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or need further support. Hang in there — you're doing great work that helps those in need!

Best regards,
Richard T. Abbott, PE

To Tell the Truth, the Whole Truth

1. Introduction – A Clear Warning

As a forensic engineer conducting inspections for insurance companies, I have witnessed several attempted fraudulent activities by contractors, particularly targeting vulnerable individuals such as widows. I want to make it clear that any fraudulent claims or actions will be thoroughly documented in my reports. While it is not within my role to take direct action against contractors, the facts I present will be available for the insurance companies to review and pursue appropriate action. Fraudulent behavior will not be tolerated, and I encourage all contractors to uphold the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

2. To Tell the Truth, the Whole Truth...

The phrase "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" is often used in legal settings, particularly when someone is taking an oath to testify in court. It means that the person promises to:

1. Tell the truth: They will provide accurate, factual information without lying.
2. Tell the whole truth: They will not omit any important facts that could change the understanding of the situation.
3. Tell nothing but the truth: They will not add any irrelevant or misleading information.

Essentially, it's a commitment to being completely honest, thorough, and clear, without leaving out or fabricating details. It should not be limited to just a court room. It should be the code of conduct for everyone regardless of the setting. It should be taught to our children, and we should lead by example.

3. The Role of the Forensic Engineer

As a forensic engineer, my primary responsibility is to conduct a thorough and unbiased evaluation of property to ensure that claims are handled fairly and accurately. I understand that the claims process can be stressful and that everyone involved wants to ensure that rightful damages are covered.

However, it is essential to clarify that the engineer's role is to assess the situation objectively, based on the facts, and to provide a clear and transparent report to a client. That report answers specific questions asked of the engineer by the client in the submitted scope of work of each specific assignment.

Collecting and documenting facts include physical observations, photographs, measurements, and verbal communication.

4. Simple Interviews

The forensic engineer's role is to report the findings clearly so the insurance company can make a fair decision based on the policy. Simple interviews are part of the process.

Some owners may have a significant amount of first-hand knowledge while others may have little to no knowledge of the facts leading up to observing damage. Whatever the case may be, it is good to establish some sort of timeline of events.

Contractors, as well, may have important information to share, while others may not.

5. To: Property Owners & Contractors

While it's natural to want to maximize a claim, it's important to remember that insurance policies are in place to cover legitimate, documented damage. It's critical that any reported damage aligns with what is covered under the policy and is genuinely sustained during the event that led to the claim.

Falsifying, overstating, or misrepresenting damage not only jeopardizes the integrity of the claims process but could also lead to legal consequences, including potential fraud charges.

Owners and contractors are encouraged to share whatever they want to share in order for the engineer to understand the full extent of the damage. Cooperating in an open and honest dialog during an interview is an important aspect of a damage assessment study.

This transparency helps in ensuring that the claim is processed efficiently and correctly.

Many times I have arrived at an inspection to find that the owner was not present.

I have also heard owners state, "My contractor wants to be present. They will be there and will be my representative in my absence." While it might seem convenient to owners to pass all communication off to a contractor, it is not appropriate.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce issues Bulletin 2010-04 on September 17, 2010. It is still applicable today. Contractors are not to be seen as offering representation services.

I allow contractors to be the sole person at a property during a damage assessment inspection, but an owner's first-hand knowledge of a property is still good information to document.

6. To: Insurance Representatives

I understand that Insurance Representatives often face the misconception that they are only trying to save the insurance company money or deny claims. Based on years of experience witnessing how the insurance industry is set up and regulated, that is not the case.

The Insurance Representative's role is to ensure that claims are processed in alignment with policy coverage.

I have heard over and over that the Insurance Representative needs to know what is damaged and why it was damaged. When that is determined, they compare that to policy coverage. If something is a covered loss, money is paid. If something is not a covered loss they cannot pay.

This process cannot happen without an impartial and factual inspection of the property.

Insurance companies must ensure that only legitimate claims are paid out without overpaying or underpaying for any damage.

Insurance Representatives share a common goal: to ensure that rightful claims are handled in a fair and efficient manner, based on accurate assessments.

7. Summary

Fraudulent claims harm everyone involved, including policyholders, contractors, insurance companies, and the broader community. By working together, we can maintain the integrity of the claims process and ensure that people receive the support they need when they experience legitimate loss.

Thank you for your cooperation, transparency, and understanding throughout this process. My role is to find the truth, nothing more, nothing less.

If you have any questions or concerns about an inspection, please feel free to reach out to the insurance claims representative, and I will be happy to address an item through the current channels.

Sincerely,

Richard T. Abbott, PE
Abbott Consulting Forensics and Design
www.abbottforensics.com