

EH 101-110

865 words

2/08/08

Home Owner Specials

One misconception about home repairs which I have become aware of is that homeowners think they can do them themselves. Due to my many years of experience in residential construction and repair this has become painfully obvious. Homeowners can often successfully tackle simple tasks around their homes, like replacing a light bulb. However, most people should leave the more challenging work to the experts. Most “do it yourselfers” have unrealistic expectations about how well they can complete a home project without proper training. Repairs performed by homeowners who don’t know how usually don’t look or function well. When I see work that has been done incorrectly, or with very poor quality, I call it a “homeowner special.” Some of the “homeowner specials” are pretty humorous, but most are just a sad waste of materials, money, and time.

There are usually unexpected expenses, and it is unlikely most people realize the time it takes to go back and forth to get needed tools and supplies. Ironically, it is usually an attempt to save money which convinces people to bite off more than they can chew. Home repairs completed with extremely poor quality will most certainly decrease the selling price of a house. It is common for folks to underestimate the material costs for a given project, as well as the price of needed tools. In four years of building houses and doing home repairs, my company spent well over five thousand dollars on tools alone. It is unlikely for someone who lacks the expertise to estimate the material costs correctly for a given project.

It must be tempting to believe that there is little knowledge needed to correctly complete home repairs. The fact that most people who do construction type work aren't well paid leads them to think that there is no skill required. Most repairs don't require a permit from the county or city, which allows very foolish and dangerous things to happen to houses. If an expert is hired who has a working familiarity with building codes, including hurricane strapping, a house can be fixed in a way that will maintain its structural integrity. I used to rent a house in Pensacola which had a room addition. This house was a "homeowner special," the rear half of the house was gradually dropping from the rest of the house. The reason for the slow collapse is the person who did the work had no understanding of footings (the concrete poured under the house to support the points where the weight of the house rests). The same house had no insulation in the floor, which allowed a polar-type breeze from outside in the winter and an oven-hot wind in the summer. There was no insulation in the ceiling either, so unless it was perfect weather outside, living in that house was miserable. Obviously, someone thought they were being frugal, but sadly, they were just being idiotic and ignorant!

The apartment I live in right now is also a "homeowner special," The second floor is sagging in the middle, which indicates that the floor trusses (the two by fours) were not adequate to support the weight of the walls and the roof. Because of the sagging floor the doors are all jammed at the top and furniture leans so far it almost falls over. One of the windows is made of plexi-glass because someone did not know how to replace a window in a brick wall. The door for the laundry room isn't wide enough to fit any washer or dryer through. This is a really silly mistake, because to use a washer and dryer, I would have to have them in the dining room. Some of this stuff would be funny, except that I have to live there. I could fix the place, but I know the landlord isn't concerned enough to spend the thousands of dollars needed just for building materials. This "homeowner special" is a disastrous example of the misconception that you can do it yourself.

When we try and do things outside of our field(s) of expertise we are often wasting more time. I do simple maintenance on my automobile but recognize the limitations of my inexperience. I need my engine rebuilt, but I am no mechanic. I will spend my time working and get my engine rebuilt by those who know how. If people decide to do without insulation, they will cause themselves or somebody else to spend extra time fixing their mistake. A licensed tradesman would never make that mistake.

It is important to have the proper tools to complete any given home repair. Knowing how to use the tools and being familiar with accessories for them prevents headaches. The tools needed to complete certain repairs can be pretty expensive. Some are nearly impossible to find. Subcontractors and contractors who are qualified already have needed tools. Without them, easy tasks can be grueling

By hiring trained professionals to do their jobs, we can make the most of our resources and focus on our own jobs. We hire mechanics to fix cars, and accountants to do taxes. We should hire tradesmen to do home repairs.