

Routine Maintenance, Repairs and Improvements

There are five different levels of maintenance operations.

- **Routine maintenance** - Cleaning gutters and windows, caulking, touch up exterior paint
- **Preventive maintenance** - Replacing air-conditioning filters, furnace inspection
- **Corrective maintenance** - When something breaks it must be fixed. Actual repairs that keep utilities and amenities functioning. Repairing leaky faucet, deteriorating siding, leaky basement, hazardous electrical wiring
- **Cosmetic maintenance** - New wallpaper, light fixtures, carpet
- **Deferred maintenance** - Obvious repairs are postponed and are not made when needed

Mark the calendar to periodically to gather information on necessary maintenance and repairs interior and exterior. You should schedule seasonal checks of roofing, weatherproofing, major systems and short term plans for redecorating and landscaping. Always keep a written maintenance log.

A Simple Maintenance and Repair Plan Should Cover

- Scope of the type of maintenance or repair
- Location of the work
- Maintenance and/or repair priorities
- Method to accomplish each type of work
- Outline of materials, permits, specs and plans needed
- Number of workers needed
- Hours needed to complete the work
- Work plan and cost estimate of each job

When using a work crew the scope and location of the job should be accurately described in advance where they will be working and what tools they need for the job. Job priorities are scheduled in sequence in which the work for the day, the week or the month is to be performed.

“Do-it-yourself” Repairs

Expensive tools or lots of experience aren't always required to make many basic home repairs. Taking care of small repairs before they become big projects can save you both time and aggravation. Preventive maintenance can actually extend the life of appliances and systems and avoid expensive repairs. Some hardware or home improvement stores also offer basic repair courses.

Major Repairs and Home Improvements

Sooner or later, you'll need an expert to address one or more major repairs. Perhaps the washing machine is broken or the water heater stops working. Or maybe you want to make some major home improvements to one or more of your units prior to renting them. Establish a network of professional specialized service providers to call upon when needed.

Faulty and Unsafe Conditions

- Defective handrails, loose steps
- Holes in carpet or other flooring, unsafe floorboards

- Fire from defective heater or wiring
- Pesticide sprayed
- Oil-slicked water in garage or ultra slick floor wax
- Electrical burns from wall outlets
- Slips and falls on wet glass
- Swimming pools, fishpond
- Excessive filth, flees, insect infestation
- Foul odors
- Leaky ceilings, roofs
- No heat, no water, defective plumbing, heating, electrical, water heater
- Improper wiring
- Broker appliances, windows, doors
- Bedbugs

Many environmental hazards cannot be seen and they may not become apparent until they cause injury or property damage. Do your best to identify and address environmental hazards before they cause serious problems. All leaks and flooding should be addressed promptly so that you can quickly take steps for a remedy. Inspect and maintain your systems and appliances.

- **Asbestos** - U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration - www.osha.gov, www.epa.gov/asbestos
- **Lead-based Paint** - Environmental Protection Agency - www.epa.gov/lead, 800-424-LEAD, www.leadlistiing.org, www.hud.gov/lea
- **Radon** - www.epa.gov/iaq/radon, 800-767-7236
- **Carbon Monoxide** - www.epa.gov/iaq/co.html, 202-824-7000, American Gas Association www.aga.org
- **Mold** - www.epa.gov/mold
- **Bedbugs** - www.hsph.harvard.edu/bedbugs, www.techletter.com
- **Electromagnetic Fields** - www.niehs.nih.gov

Fire Safety

In 2009, firefighters across our Nation continued to respond to over 4,500 calls per day. Over the past 10 years, fires in the United States have averaged about 1,634,150 each year. During this same period, there have been approximately 3,625 deaths and 18,765 injuries reported annually as the result of fires. Annually, direct property loss from fires is estimated at \$11.6 billion (when adjusted to 2008 dollars, the annual direct property loss increases to \$13.2 billion) and the total cost of fire including adding fire protection to buildings, paid fire departments, the equivalent cost of volunteer fire departments, insurance overhead, fire-related losses, fire injuries, and other direct and indirect costs to the American economy is estimated to be more than \$182 billion. The Nation's estimated 1.2 million firefighters continued their efforts to prevent, respond to, and help residents recover from all hazards. The United States Fire Administration (USFA) recognizes the challenges presented by the Nation's fire problem, and continues its efforts to contribute to the safety of not only the residents of this Nation, but our firefighters and emergency responders and allied professionals as well.

Fire Safety Tips

- Discuss with all tenant members what to do in the event of a fire
- Draw a floor plan with at least two ways of escaping every room
- Create a drawing for each floor. Dimensions do not need to be correct.
- Include in your plan important details, i.e. stairs, hallways and windows that can be used as fire escape routes
- Test all windows and doors. Do they open easy enough? Are they wide enough? Or tall enough?
- Choose a safe meeting place outside the house
- Practice alerting other members. It is a good idea to keep a bell and flashlight in each bedroom
- Sleep with the bedroom doors closed. This will keep deadly heat and smoke out of bedrooms, giving you additional time to escape.
- Establish a way for everyone to sound a family alarm. Yelling, pounding on walls, whistles, etc. Practice yelling "FIRE!"
- In a fire, time is critical. Don't waste time getting dressed, don't search for pets or valuables. Just get out!
- Roll out of bed. Stay low. One breath of smoke or gases may be enough to kill.
- Feel all doors before opening them. If a door is hot, get out another way.
- Learn to stop, drop to the ground, and roll if clothes catch fire.

Resources

- Fire Safety - www.firesafety.gov
- National Fire Protection Association - www.nfpa.org
- Home Safety Council - www.homesafetycouncil.org/SafetyGuide/sg_fire_w001.asp
- Georgia Office of Insurance & Safety Fire Commission - www.gainsurance.org
- Wayne Dixon, 404-808-0069, Email: allsafe@windstream.net, www.allsafefiresafetyeducation.com

Selecting Contractors

There are several different types of home improvement quotes used by contractors today.

Types of Home Improvement Quotes

- Estimates
- Bids
- Time plus materials
- Price not to exceed
- Hidden damage

Estimates

This is an educated guess about the time and material costs necessary to complete your medium to large job.

Bids

This is a firm quote on labor and materials for your job and will be the amount you pay. Time Plus Materials (T + M). You are charged only for the actual time worked and materials purchased.

Price Not to Exceed

This is like T+M but provides the property owner with a price the project will not exceed.

Hidden Damage

Damage discovered that could not be seen before starting your project is not included in any of these methods.

Make Sure the Contractor That You Choose Is the Right One

- Do you have a state Contractors License?
- Business license - Can you verify their business address?
- Proof of Liability Insurance, Bonded, Workman's Comp
- Check Better Business Bureau
- Do they accept credit cards payment?
- How long have they been in business?
- Do they offer an "On-time" guarantee?
- How close are they to the home?
- Will they produce a budget for the repair project on their letterhead - ask for a material list and cost
- What is their employee screening process?
- How will I contact the repairmen before and during the job?
- What is there warranty coverage? Will they give guarantees in writing?
- Will you come back after the job is finished at no cost if needed?
- Do you require a deposit on small to medium jobs?
- How soon can you begin the job?
- Do you have a resume and references from a bank, suppliers, and happy customers?
- Do you belong to trade organizations?
- Do you file taxes?

Don't ever hire someone who comes to your door offering you a "deal" because they had a job cancellation or available time in their schedule they need to fill. They could be one of those operations that get an up-front deposit and then disappears.

Ask contractors for a work plan and cost estimate for each job. Contractors must sign an agreement to complete the work per their estimate and time line. Include a statement that describes the penalty if work is not completed or satisfactory. A good idea is to pay for materials direct up front and labor fees based on progress. It is hard to recoup if you pay a large portion of the project fees upfront and the contractor does not finish the work. If any changes are made to the work plan, prepare an amendment and have all parties date and sign. Do not rely on a verbal agreement

Do your homework regarding improvements. Visit www.realtor.org and search for "cost vs. value".

Maintenance Warranties

A home warranty is a one year renewable service contract that covers the repairs or replacement of many of the most frequently occurring repairs of home system components and appliances. You can customize your maintenance policy and coverage can include single-family homes, new construction, condominiums, townhouses, mobile homes and multiunit dwellings. This type of contract can provide a peace of mind to the owner of the property. Each warranty company is different. Read the contract to identify what is covered before you sign.

Resources

Old Republic Home Warranty - www.orhp.com

American Home Shield - www.ahs.com

Sears-4-My-Home - 800-4-MY-HOME