HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GET A QUALITY REPAIR

For contracted repairs

If you are planning a repair, whether do-it-yourself or contracted, there are a number of things you can do to help ensure a quality job:

1. DO YOUR "HOMEWORK" FIRST

Before you start getting estimates, learn as much as you can about the repair to be done – how the job should be done correctly, what choices you'll have regarding materials and installation methods, what your City's building code requires (for permit jobs), etc. The more you know what the "issues" are, the better prepared you'll be to discuss the repair with the professionals.

In a few situations, even after your research, you may not be sure exactly how a repair should be made. In that case, you'll need to rely on the bidding process itself to get information. Meet personally with at least three contractors and interview them. Be sure you understand how each thinks the repair should be done (ask lots of "why" questions), and then get the proposals in writing. Compare the three written bids – and, if you don't see a common thread, get another.

2. ASK QUESTIONS

In most cases, your research will probably have given you a pretty clear idea of the issues you'll want to talk to the contractor or supplier about. (You may want to jot a few things down, so your questions are consistent from one person to the next.) Now, let each professional tell you what he/she is proposing.

> **TIP**
>
> Make it clear that you are looking at cost – that you expect a fair and reasonable price – but never give the impression that all you're looking for is a cheap job.

ASK ABOUT	WHAT TO FIND OUT
Materials	Ask about the quality of materials to be installed; if one material estimate is higher than another, ask about the difference (a higher price may be the result of a "designer look," rather than a more durable material.) Particularly for an interior job, find out if the material is easy to care for.
Construction methods	Ask about the construction methods to be used – and whether, in the opinion of the professional, what is being proposed is all that will be needed for a long-lasting repair. (It won't help to replace the roofing material on a garage if the rafters and sheathing beneath it are rotted and can't provide good support.)

ASK ABOUT	WHAT TO FIND OUT
Who will do the job	Ask who will do the job – is the person who is giving you the bid a salesperson who doesn't do actual hands-on repair work, or has he/she had real experience? Who will be overseeing the work – how much will that person actually be at the job site?
Unfinished work	Will any work be left unfinished for someone else to complete (i.e., holes left in walls after plumbing or electrical work?)
Guarantees	Ask about the guarantees on materials (and, if you will be contracting the work, on the labor) to be given.

Ask the professional to provide a written bid detailing all these issues.

3. EVALUATE THE INFORMATION

Next, look at the bids and see whether you're getting a reasonable price for good workmanship. You want to end up with a repair that is structurally sound, long-lasting, and done in a workmanlike manner to the current standards of the trade.

> **Cheaper is not necessarily better!**

4. CHECK REFERENCES

Ask for and check one or two households who have used the contractor for similar work, or who have had the same material installed. Find out if there were any problems with the repair, and, if so, whether they were resolved promptly.

Also check the contractor's qualifications. If the work will require a permit, confirm with the Building Department that the contractor is licensed and bonded in your city.

5. THINK AHEAD

Finally, spend a few minutes thinking about what could go wrong – paint splattered on your shingled roof, mortar smeared on a brick foundation, etc. – and see if you have something in the contract agreement to protect you.

> **REMEMBER**
>
> You can't necessarily rely on permit requirements to protect you. In most cases, permits will cover code issues (how deep the concrete for your driveway needs to be, for example), but don't define the qualities of workmanship that determine how the job will "look." It's up to you to discuss those issues with the contractor and make sure everything important to you is in writing!

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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