Home Repair Resource center

HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

# VINYL SIDING

*Issues to discuss with your contractor*

There are several points you should pay attention to, in order to get a nice looking, good quality vinyl siding installation on your house:

## SEVEN POINTS FOR A QUALITY JOB

### 1 THE MATERIAL

The material you select is also important to the quality of the job. The vinyl siding you choose should have an appearance that is historically correct and appropriate for the style of your house. You can find vinyl siding that simulates cedar shingles, as well as other decorative styles of siding (scallops, waves, etc.). Talk to an expert in historic preservation if one is available in your city (Cleveland Heights residents can call the City's Planning Department), or consult the preservation experts at the Cleveland Restoration Society (216-426-1000) regarding the style, size, and texture appropriate to the time your house was built.

In addition to its appearance, check the quality of the siding to be used. Generally, the thicker the material used, the better. Siding is sold in gauges (thicknesses) of .030 and up. Older homes work better with about .040 gauge siding.

### 2 TRIM AROUND DOORS AND WINDOWS

How the trim around the doors and windows is covered has a lot to do with the final look of the job. A contractor may suggest "jumping the casing," a process that brings the new siding on top of the existing trim, right to the edge of the window or door. The finished effect is that of a house without trim. This never looks appropriate. A better solution is to have the trim covered with flat aluminum, bent on site to closely match the existing style. When this aluminum trim is installed with corners that are mitered and properly caulked, the look is one that retains the architectural integrity of the house.

### 3 COLOR

Color selection is much more important with vinyl siding than paint. Dark colors can fade in a few years, and the sun-exposed sides of the house may end up lighter than the shaded face. At this time, vinyl siding is almost impossible to paint, so you'll have to live with the color(s) you choose for 25 to 35 years—a long-term commitment to that color scheme. The Cleveland Restoration Society or local paint stores have people experienced with color selection to help you.

### 4 CONDITION OF THE PRESENT SIDING

Before new vinyl siding is installed, the condition of the present siding should be assessed. Concentrated areas of peeling paint, siding boards that are severely warped or rotted, or sections of siding that have moss, fungus, or algae on them are indications of moisture problems—generally, the result of moisture coming through the walls of the house (usually near a kitchen or bath). Water can also enter the walls from a leaking roof or gutters that overflow into the soffit. These conditions should be corrected first. Otherwise, the vinyl siding won't let the sun dry out the underlying wood, and you'll make matters worse—possibly leading to the wall studs rotting out over a 10–15 year period.

### SKIP THE FOAM BACKER BOARD

For this reason, use of foam insulation/backer board under vinyl siding is usually not a good idea. It can block the weep holes in the siding and prevent moisture from passing through it, and it doesn't provide much insulation for what it costs. It is no substitute for insulation in the sidewalls.

5 **INSULATION AND HOUSEWRAP**

If you wish to insulate your house at the same time that you install vinyl siding, you can have the contractor blow insulation between the existing walls into the stud cavities. If the existing siding is badly rotted or deteriorated, you may need to remove it before the new vinyl is installed. In that case, a vapor-permeable housewrap can be applied over the sheathing before the new vinyl siding is installed; this material doesn't add insulation, but will stop much of the air movement through the walls.

6 **ROOM FOR EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION**

An important detail of quality installation is allowing enough room for the natural expansion and contraction of the siding. If the siding is nailed too tightly or too loosely, then it can develop sagging or buckling problems. At spots where the siding meets other materials, there should be a tight enough fit so that a bead of caulk no wider than a finger will effectively seal the gap. Any gaps wider than that will eventually allow water to get underneath the siding. Places to check include trim edges, where the siding meets a chimney, and any other areas that aren't sealed by a molding strip.

7 **FINISHING DETAILS**

A quality installation will include use of a good quality silicone caulk that is color-coordinated to the siding; a completed job that is entirely weatherproof; installation of all materials so that they are level and plumb; and a finished job that has a neat appearance. These are details to look for in previous jobs the contractor has done, and you might wish to include them in your contract.

### WHEN IT'S DONE WELL

You can attractively re-side your house with vinyl siding. When a job is done well, no one notices the siding. It is only when there is poor quality workmanship or an inattention to detail that the end result is less than pleasing.

## MAINTENANCE

Most people believe that vinyl siding requires no annual maintenance. While it doesn't need much, there are some things you should do to protect your investment:

1 Once each year, wash the exterior with a mild soap and soft brush, rinsing thoroughly. Or, you can use a pressure washer. If you allow the natural accumulation of dirt to remain, the action of the wind blowing over it will create a scouring or sanding effect that will damage the finish of the siding.

2 While cleaning, check all caulked areas to make sure they haven't opened up and are allowing water to get behind the siding. Promptly repair any opened areas to make the siding weather-tight once again.

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

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