

Take the Stress Out of Home Repairs

What is the most important part of any fix-it project? Remembering who was the last one to borrow the power saw? Possibly, or it might just be the planning that should go into the repair. Spending ample time beforehand evaluating and planning a project or repair can save time, money and frustration later on.

If a consumer product breaks down, there is usually information available to help troubleshoot and make necessary repairs. Owner's manuals typically accompany most consumer products, and if a manual gets lost, it may be available to download from manufacturers' websites. On-line forums can also provide valuable information, but it is important to research and evaluate any suggestions before following on-line advice.



Whether the fix-it project is a product repair or a home maintenance fix, using the right tools is an essential step in the process. Unfortunately, finding the tools in the garage might be harder than the repair itself. To eliminate the hunt, designating an area for tool storage is essential to keep track of them and eliminate the need for purchasing a tool multiple times.



When it comes to tackling home-repair problems, knowing whether a repair is a project for the homeowner or for a professional is a question that needs to be addressed. Some home projects involve working with electrical and plumbing systems. Mistakes in these areas can be costly, as well as create safety or health issues. Extensive research of a project before the start will eliminate

most potentially dangerous or hazardous situations. In addition, homeowners need to be realistic when deciding what they can do and what should be turned over to licensed contractors. Homeowners also need to know what repairs call for permits and inspections.

Then, even though the spirit is willing, the pocketbook can't be weak. It is important to have a realistic view of what the project might cost before jumping in. Many home-repair projects become stalled because of a lack of funds. To help accurately estimate costs, asking questions at home repair centers, as well as obtaining bids from several home remodeling professionals will provide a framework of possible costs.

A second commodity that can run in short supply is time. It is as frustrating to run out of time on a project as it is to run out of money. To decrease this possibility, creating a timeline can help keep a project running smoothly. For do-it-yourselfers, a good rule-of-thumb is to create a timeline and then double the time allotted for each step. If products or materials need to be ordered, it is important to place orders early, to keep the job flowing smoothly. Finding out that materials or supplies are on back-order can create significant delays. If the project involves coordinating the work of a homeowner and contractor, or several sub-contractors, setting a schedule is important. Updating and revising the schedule should be done as work continues.



How to decide where to start? The obvious answer is eliminating problems that are causing unhealthy, unsafe or inefficient operation of a home. Prioritizing is a way to keep a running list of needed repairs, as well as projects that are wants but not needs. Once critical repairs have been made, moving forward on projects to enhance a room or area in a home can occur.



The Residential Energy Property Credit, set to expire the last day of 2010, may provide additional incentive to tackle some projects sooner rather than later. Consumers who purchase and install specific products, such as energy-efficient windows, insulation, doors, roofs, and heating or cooling equipment in existing homes can receive a tax credit for 30% of the cost for the product (excluding labor for installation), up to \$1,500, for improvements "placed in service" by December 31, 2010. For details about other incentives and restrictions, visit the ENERGY STAR website: www.energystar.gov. ENERGY STAR is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.