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# Performing DIY Projects in Oregon

For many people, DIY projects are a part of homeownership. DIY projects help save money when you're on a tight budget, and can also give you a sense of satisfaction. It feels good to take care of your own home.

Successful home improvement projects take effort and planning. Knowing all the steps, getting permits when needed and taking precautions to do the work safely is important. Here's what you need to know about performing DIY projects in Oregon.

## Get the Required Permits

Oregon law requires you to obtain local permits for a range of installations, alterations, and construction performed on your home to ensure that the work meets minimum standards for safe construction. Permits are required for all new construction, including additions, as well as for specific remodels, alterations, and repairs to existing homes, which include structural, plumbing, mechanical and electrical changes.

The person performing the work, whether it is a homeowner or contractor, is responsible for obtaining all necessary permits. Once the permit is issued, you can begin work.

- The permit must be on site and available to the inspector and if your permit has accompanying approved plans, they must be available as well.
- Your permit expires if work is not started within 180 days from its issuance, unless an extension has been granted locally.
- Once you have begun work, your permit expires if work is suspended or abandoned for 180 days or more, unless an extension has been granted locally.
- If you cannot work within a 180-day period but do not wish to abandon the project, you need to submit a request to the local building official for a possible extension.

**How can I get a permit?**
Most cities or counties have a local building department that provides plan review, permit, and inspection services. Use the Local Building Department Directory to find where to access services in your area. Look up your local building department in Building Code Division's online directory.

**Which projects require a permit?**
If you live in a detached one- or two-family dwelling, a description of which projects require a permit can be found here: https://www.oregon.gov/bcd/lbdd/pages/oregon-permits.aspx

If you still are not sure whether you need a permit, locate and contact the building department responsible for your area through the Building Code Division online directory.

## Focus on Safety

In the spring of 2020, when many people were stuck at home and performing home repairs, injuries from making home improvements accounted for 3% of all emergency room visits. Doing the work yourself can be dangerous if you're not taking precautions and using proper safety equipment. Gashes, concussions, broken bones and burns are all the kind of injuries that homeowners experience when they're doing the work themselves.

**Ask yourself, is this project safe?**
The National Home Security Alliance recommends reconsidering a DIY project if:
- You have trouble understanding the directions.
- You may not have time to complete the job without rushing, or if leaving it unfinished would create safety or health hazards in your home.
- Serious injury or property damage is possible.

**Invest in safety gear.** Keep protective glasses, gloves, ear plugs and a respirator on hand for DIY projects.
**Use the right tools.**

Ask yourself:
- Do I have the right tools for this project?
- Are the tools in good condition?

Inspect your tools before starting the work. Verify the tools you have are the right tools for the job.

**Know which projects have the greatest potential to go wrong.**

**Electrical**. Electrical work can be dangerous if you don't have a firm understanding of electrical systems. Always turn off the power before starting an electrical project and verify the power is off using a voltmeter. Incorrect wiring can result in an electrical fire. Keep a Class C fire extinguisher around to extinguish electrical fires, and replace your fire extinguisher when it has expired.

**Ladders**. Every year, **500,000 are treated for ladder related injuries**. If you're using ladders, be sure to choose the right type of ladder for the job you're doing. Have someone nearby to spot you, and familiarize yourself with basic ladder safety. The American Ladder Institute publishes an excellent online resource with a wide range of safety suggestions.

**Protect yourself and household members from toxic lead dust.**

Any renovation, repair, or painting (RRP) project in a pre-1978 home that has lead-based paint can easily create dangerous lead dust. If you are planning an RRP project in a pre-1978 home, EPA recommends homeowners hire a lead-safe certified contractor who is certified and trained in lead-safe work practices, meaning a group of techniques to prevent lead exposure resulting from renovation and repair activities. If you are planning to do an RRP project on a pre-1978 home yourself, the EPA has posted a Lead-Safe Renovations for DIYers page that has information to help.

**Protect yourself and household members from asbestos.**

Residential buildings may contain asbestos in their walls, ceilings, floors, roofs, siding, HVAC systems, insulation, pipes and more. When asbestos-containing material is disturbed and improperly handled, tiny hazardous fibers are released into the air and may cause lung cancer and other illnesses. It's important for homeowners to identify asbestos and have it properly removed before beginning remodeling projects.

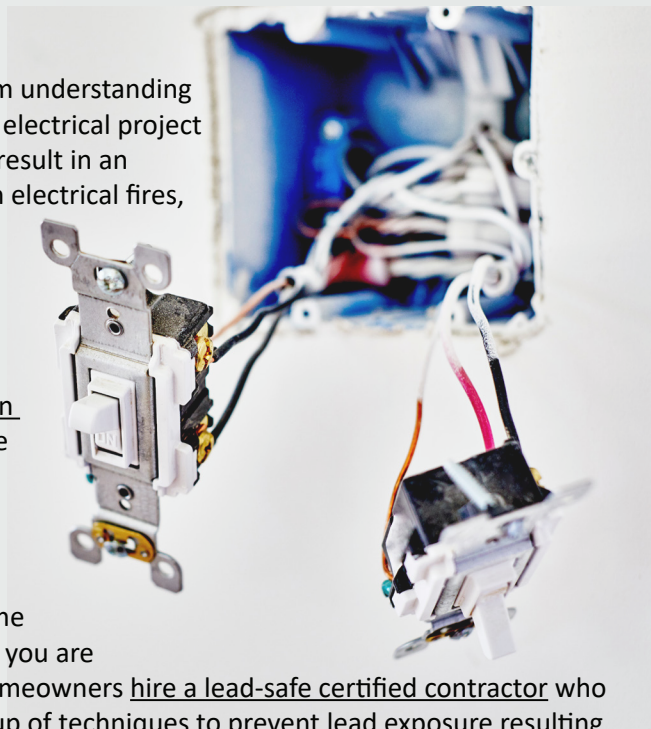**You can learn more about which materials may contain asbestos here.**

There are two options for asbestos abatement in an owner-occupied single unit private residence. The owner-occupant of a home may: 1) hire a DEQ-licensed asbestos abatement contractor, or 2) remove the asbestos themselves. Homeowners choosing to remove the asbestos themselves must follow Oregon's requirements for asbestos waste packaging and disposal.

Learn more about how to find out if/where your home has asbestos on the Oregon DEQ website.

## DIYing to Save Money? Know the Real Cost

DIY projects may seem less expensive, but there are many costs to consider before doing it yourself. Know the cost of doing it yourself before you begin. To estimate, research the project step by step. Knowing what you'll do at each step of the project is important.

- **Tools.** Tools represent a significant cost for many home improvement projects, especially in the first years of homeownership. As you build up your arsenal of tools, you may spend less money purchasing tools. Keep in mind that many projects require specialized tools that are only used one time.
- **Safety equipment.** Just because you're doing the work yourself doesn't mean that you can skip the safety equipment. Know what safety equipment is important to have on hand and be prepared to invest.
- **Materials.** Whether you're buying paint and paintbrushes or a shelf to hang on the wall, know what kind of materials are required for your project and their prices.
- **Disposal fees.** Remember that waste materials at the end will need to be disposed of, and if this doesn't fit into your waste bin, or if your sanitation company won't take it, you may have to dispose of it at a special facility.

Other cost considerations:

**Time.** If time is money, your DIY project could be far more expensive than you realize. Professionals are often able to complete home improvement projects much faster because they have the knowledge, experience, tools and team to make the project go quickly.

**Possible repairs.** You may nail the project on your first try, but if you don't, you could end up paying to undo some of your work and then perform repairs. You could even find yourself paying for a professional to do this for you.

## DIY Tips

**Start small.** If you're new to homeownership and new to performing DIY work, start with a small project with little chance for damage or injury. Hanging blinds, building a raised garden bed, painting a bedroom, wallpapering a wall – all of these low-stakes projects make good starter DIY projects. Once you've done some of these easy projects, you may be ready to move into more complicated projects.

**Have a plan.** Know how you're going to proceed with your project from start to finish, so you can gather materials and tools, and set aside the correct amount of time to get the work done. Don't start a project you don't know how to finish.

You can learn a lot about home repair by watching online tutorials or by watching an expert do their work, but it's important to ensure that you're learning from someone who really knows how to do the work, or from a reputable online resource.

**Consider doing part of the work yourself and part with help from a contractor.** If you're trying to save money but want to ensure that a skilled professional is responsible for the hard stuff, talk to your contractor about doing some of the unskilled tasks yourself. Demolition, disposal of waste material, painting the wall at the end – all of these tasks can be great DIY projects. Talk to your contractor to find out if they will collaborate with you and allow you to do some of the work yourself.

If you decide to hire a contractor to help with your home improvement projects, remember to check the license on the CCB's website: https://www.oregon.gov/ccb/Pages/default.aspx

You can also request some of our informational brochures on this page on the CCB website: https://www.oregon.gov/ccb/Pages/Consumer-Tools.aspx#ConsumerPublications

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