

## Around the House

Q. How should I choose a contractor to remodel my home?

A. Take your time selecting a contractor in order to protect yourself. First, make a list of everything the project will include. Invite three or more contractors to discuss the project and give you bids.

When you meet with each contractor, verify the company's contact information, its proof of workers' compensation and liability insurance and references from projects like yours. Reputable contractors do not pressure you into quick decisions, so avoid anyone who does.

As you interview contractors, you will learn about them. Take note of how promptly they respond, whether they take time to answer all your questions and if they seem familiar with the building code. It's your home, so take all the time you need to make sure you are comfortable.

Q. How can I avoid cost increases during a remodeling project?

A. Many homeowners get frustrated when cost grows during a project. Some increases are normal, especially when contractors uncover problems during demolition. These are the types of things to discuss before you sign any contract.

When crafting a contract for the project, avoid using allowances. Some contractors use allowances to budget for lighting, plumbing fixtures and other materials up to a certain amount. If the contractor gives low allowances to keep his bid low, you may be unhappy with the result, or you may end up going over your budget. By agreeing to a detailed contract with specific materials, you can avoid some of these problems.

In other cases, consumers "get ideas" during the process. Some contractors even suggest adding an extra 20 percent to your original budget for these additions. Major renovations are infrequent, so homeowners may decide to upgrade appliances and fixtures because they are not planning to revisit that part of their home for years.

Extra costs also pile up when homeowners add items during the project. It's important to make these requests to the lead contractor – not his subcontractors or employees. Still, you are better off listing and organizing your needs at the start of the project, rather than adding electric outlets, light switches and faucets during the project.

The cure is simple: Plan carefully and stick to your plan.

Q. What other things should I discuss with my contractor before work begins?

Save yourself some frustration by covering important issues before work begins on your remodeling project.

Ask for a definite start date and a proposed construction schedule. Make sure the contractor tells you his work hours, so you are not taken by surprise.

Many homeowners make arrangements for their pets to stay elsewhere during renovation projects. This not only avoids unneeded stress on the pets, but also helps ensure pets don't interfere with the work.

Finally, discuss bathroom usage and parking. Only you know if it's acceptable for workers to use your bathrooms, but consider the expense of renting portable toilets for their use. When it comes to parking, moving your vehicles in advance will save you the trouble of asking workers to move their trucks to let you out of your driveway. If you will be home, try to keep your cars out of the way to allow workers space to unload materials.

Pennsylvania Builders Association provides this column as a public service. Readers should consult with a PBA member or other professional before undertaking home improvements. Visit PBA online at [PaBuilders.org](http://PaBuilders.org). Send questions to Around the House, PBA, 600 N. 12th St., Lemoyne, PA 17043, or to [aroundthehouse@pabuilders.org](mailto:aroundthehouse@pabuilders.org).