

Tips on home fix-up offered

By JACKIE KLEIN

The Home Improvement Council of Metropolitan Detroit (HIC) isn't a consumer organization. But it strives to protect the consumer.

That's the assessment of Kay Wolin, administrator of the Southfield-based, non-profit council, members of which include contractors, financial lenders, utility companies, suppliers of building materials and the media.

"By professionalizing the home improvement industry and educating the public and contractors, we are protecting consumers," Ms. Wolin said. "Our major goal is to maintain a high standard of ethics in the remodeling industry and weed out the few get-rich-quick schemers."

There's a microfilm in the MIC off-

ice with a list of every state licensed contractor and what they are licensed to do. Ms. Wolin said she sent out 4,000 directories bearing these names in response to home repair inquiries.

"Even company salespersons must be licensed and licenses are renewable each year," Ms. Wolin said. "We insist the contractors included in the directories have credit reports, references, adequate insurance and a track record of at least one year in business."

Members of HIC, one of 41 offshoots of the National Home Improvement Council, pay \$200 a year in dues. The local council sponsors seminars on energy and other issues affecting the remodeling business and has been active in lobbying efforts to improve the industry, Ms. Wolin said.

EXPENDITURES for home

improvement are expected to reach a record \$85 billion by 1985, according to Joel Helfman, new HIC president.

"New home prices and escalating mortgage interest rates are out of reach for many persons," Helfman said. "It also costs a lot to move and more homeowners are staying in their houses and remodeling to meet their growing needs."

"Most home improvement contractors are reliable professionals. The council has made great strides in our campaign to rid the industry of contractors who bend the rules. We provide consumers with a list of reputable companies and that's better than looking through the yellow pages. It boils down to faith between two parties — the customer and the contractor."

The council works closely with the Better Business Bureau, Helfman said, and is involved in arbitration proceedings when needed to resolve complaints.

As the administrator of the organization, Ms. Wolin said she is often placed in the position of acting as chief information officer.

"LAST YEAR, my job was limited to provide information to the very few persons who sought it," Ms. Wolin said. "I had to preach about the council. But in the past several months, we've reached a point where I no longer have to seek forums to present our story." The HIC offers the following list of what to avoid if you're planning on re-

novating or improving your home and are looking for a contractor:

• The high-pressure telephone salesperson who colors the deal with the tempting bonus of "If you act now."

• Workmen who offer to do home repair jobs on the spot from the back of trucks, boasting they just finished a job down the street.

• Any salesperson who shows up immediately after a reputable home improvement representative has left in the company-labeled vehicle. The Johnny-on-the-spot salesperson will usually try to undercut the other estimate by a substantial margin.

Before signing any type of home improvement contract, Ms. Wolin advised, check the company's record with the Better Business Bureau. For any job costing more than \$200, the law says the company or contractor must be licensed by the state, she said.

To find out if a contractor is licensed, Ms. Wolin said call Ms. Wolin at 559-2373 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.

HIC members, she said, are pledged to a code of ethics which includes truth in advertising, accurate description of products and services, contracts which are fair and not ambiguous, prompt fulfillment of contractual obligations and performance of work meeting recognized health and safety standards and current laws.

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