



## Inventory home improvement needs

Fall is an excellent time for home improvements. It is a transitional season which, like spring, is neither too hot nor too cold to accomplish major projects. During these seasons, people are more adventurous and desirous of trying new things or improving their current lot.

Besides satisfying an inner need to do "something," working on home repairs is productive. Before the winter cold sets in, analyze the "anatomy" of your house.

Begin with the exterior. Does your roof allow for proper drainage after heavy precipitation? Is the siding sturdy and aesthetically pleasing?

Are there any air leaks from the windows? Do the windows fit their frames? Do they open and close

properly? If you don't have them, you may want to consider adding storm windows.

Are there security locks or gates on windows to discourage burglars from entering? An alarm system might be worth the investment to deter criminals and provide personal security.

Is there adequate insulation? Does the thermostat regulate the heat efficiently? With the government's suggestion of lowering thermostats to save energy, it might be worthwhile to stock up on decorative afghans and woolen blankets for the cooler rooms.

There's as much to do on the inside as on the outside. If you've been procrastinating, this is the perfect time to fix up the attic or basement. Investigate refinishing

alternatives. If there are teens living at home, why not create a living space for them?

**OR CONSIDER** using parts of these rooms as studios for hobbies. Wood and metal working shops would be great for working on home repair projects through the winter.

Sandwiched between the upstairs and downstairs are the main living quarters. Take a kitchen inventory. Are there sufficient appliances and work areas to aid you in your culinary expression? Is there a way of reorganizing your available space to make it more efficient?

Inspect the living room and den. Does any of the furniture need to be reupholstered or replaced? How

about sprucing up these rooms with houseplants?

Has each room's appearance been maintained? Is it time to repaint, repaper or purchase wallhangings? Is the lighting suited to the room — soft and subtle in bedrooms, medium light in dens and living rooms, and bright in kitchens and bathrooms?

Determine whether there's a need to call a plumber, exterminator, gardener or other "specialist" to improve the efficient functioning or overall appearance of your home.

In the long run, it pays to do a thorough job maintaining your home. The benefits range from a deeper sense of pride to a higher property value when it's time to sell.

## Question building products, practices

Whether it's siding, new gutters and downspouts, new windows, or attic ventilation systems, the decision to make an improvement is just the beginning. Then come decisions concerning the product to use and the contractor to install it.

Making the right decision involves asking the right questions. To help homeowners ask the right questions, Charles Glindele, staff engineer with Alcoa Building Products and a former remodeling contractor, was asked what questions he thinks are important to ask.

According to Glindele, "When you buy a home improvement, you're buying two things: the product and the installation."

Today, a lot of people are looking for ways to save money on home improvements and that's good up to a point. But saving a few dollars on an inferior product or less than professional installation can cost a lot more down the road. Home improvements must be viewed as investments that will pay for themselves over 20 years or more.

From the numerous consumer letters received at Alcoa Building

Products, there are generally four or five typical questions most often asked.

**How can I find a good siding contractor?**

The best way is through referrals. Ask your neighbors or co-workers who have had work done on their homes. Find out if they are satisfied with the products and workmanship. Inspect the work. Stand on the sidewalk and look at a house carefully. Ask yourself if it's the quality of work you would want on your house. Find out if the contractor's prices were competitive and if he cleaned up properly after the job was finished.

**Is it necessary to get estimates?**

Because most home improvements are a major expenditure, it's a good idea to get at least three estimates. After you've talked with all three contractors, you'll have to make a choice based on price, information contained in their presentations and your examination of jobs each has done.

**Should I have a signed contract?** If the contractor is highly recommended by someone you trust and has worked in the area for a number of years, a contract may not be necessary; otherwise, it's best to have one.

The contract should specify which products will be used (the brands, colors, styles), total purchase price, amount of down payment, terms, payment schedule and types of warranties from the manufacturer and installer. It should also specify that the job will be done in a workmanlike manner, and that the installers will clear away all trash and scraps when the job is completed.

Be wary of contracts that permit the installer to use an "equivalent" product on your home. You may pay for one brand of material and get another if you sign this type of contract. Another thing to watch for is a statement that allows the distributor to put a lien on your home if the contractor doesn't pay him for the material. Any contractor who asks you to sign this type of

document should be investigated further.

**What should I look for in terms of warranties?**

The product warranty on siding varies among manufacturers. The two things to look for are: (1) The types of potential problems covered — these should include such things as defects, chipping, peeling, blistering, rusting; (2) the warranty. Standard coverage is 25-40 years. The first three to five years are generally a full and unlimited warranty under which the manufacturer will replace materials at his cost; the balance is usually prorated — the manufacturer and homeowner share replacement costs based on a table of percentages and time lapsed.

Installers usually warrant their work for at least 12 months. Be wary of any contractor offering less.

Federal law now requires that all home improvement contracts have a clause providing a 72-hour "cooling off" period, during which the homeowner can change his mind.