

LET'S REMODEL

Get expert help to test for asbestos

Q: We had a remodeling company prepare plans for improvements on our older home and the contractor indicated there may be an asbestos problem with the existing two-coat plaster. The company indicated they cannot proceed until the issue is addressed due to potential liability. He insists we handle the problem. We don't know where to start.

A: The identification of asbestos as a potential indoor air quality problem has been with us now since the mid 1970s. The major area of concern lies in the potential for latent manifestation of asbestos related diseases, which have been extensively documented in numerous studies of this material in its former usage (i.e. insulation products). The past wide spread usage of asbestos in an estimated 2500 products has caused extensive public health concerns. The first step is to determine whether or not asbestos (or ACM's - materials which contain 1 percent of greater asbestos by volume) does in fact exist in the plaster.

Several small, random samples of the suspect ACM need to be secured from the materials in question for analytical testing by a number of EPA recognized methods. These are tested as a certified laboratory. The reason for several sam-

ples is that, especially in plaster, there was not always a homogenous mixture of asbestos fibers in each batch of plaster. Consequently, a single sample could result in a negative test result.

While the homeowner could secure and submit the samples for testing, this is not highly recommended due to several reasons: 1. The complexity of submitting proper documentation along with the samples to a lab. 2. Accidental release of asbestos fibers into the home. 3. This may not convince the contractor (who is obliged by OSHA to protect his workers and subcontractors) that sufficient testing was conducted.

It is preferable to procure the services of a qualified third-party which should be a state-licensed asbestos inspector for the collection of samples. A qualified inspector would be able to identify any other suspect ACMs which may be overlooked by the lay person, but which could have an impact on the projected improvement plans.

Once the material has been tested and confirmed, it is time to seek out a qualified, professional and licensed asbestos abatement contractor.

In selecting this contractor, I suggest the following:

■ Contract the licensing board of the Michigan Department of Public Health,

Asbestos Program at 517-335-8246. They can tell you if the contractor has a current license and whether there are any existing complaints or violations.

■ Insurance is a must in dealing with hazardous materials. Look for occurrence type coverage, versus claims made. You may want to ascertain the viability of the insurance issuer.

■ Determine ahead of time, with the abatement contractor how or where the ACMs will be disposed. In closing, the potential impact of future negative health consequences (when dealing with hazardous building materials) fully warrants a cautious approach to the suspect material, as well as the expenditure of resources.

Mark Mastrangel, Control Engineering & Technology, Franklin, 810-338-8388.

For your home improvement questions or a copy of our roster booklet, call Gayle Walters, executive director of the Michigan Remodeling Association (MRA) at 810-335-3232, or send questions to "Let's Remodel," 2187 Orchard Lake Road, No. 103, Sylvan Lake, MI 48320. Answers are provided by members of the MRA, the local chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). Members



include professional contractors, manufacturers, wholesalers, consultants and lenders representing all facets of residential and light commercial remodeling. Members also answer questions on "Construction Talk" with Murray Gula on WEXL-AM 1340, 1-2 p.m. Saturday. You can call in your questions at 810-644-1340.

Digest features Ford estate

The Henry Ford Estate-Fair Lane, a National Historic Landmark, is featured in the May 1996 issue of Architectural Digest, an internationally distributed magazine.

The article, written by "Ford: The Men and the Machine" author Robert Lacey, focuses on the history and architecture of the Fair Lane residence. Photography by Tony Soluri of Chicago details the castle-like exterior of the estate, as well as the formal dining room, master bedroom, English Room and Field Room.

The Henry Ford Estate-Fair Lane is on the campus of the University of Michigan-Dearborn. The family home of Henry and Clara Ford for 35 years, the buildings were used for various purposes after Clara Ford's death in 1950. In 1957, the estate was donated by the Ford Motor Co. to the UM. Since 1978 the estate has been undergoing restoration to return it to its general condition in the mid-1920s. Now a house museum, public tours are available daily.

"We are excited that the Henry Ford Estate is again receiving national attention," said Mark Braden, manager of business operations at the estate.

The article discusses the fascinating events that led to a series of architects being responsible for the design, construction and interior appointment of Fair Lane, beginning with Frank Lloyd Wright and ending when William Van Pelt of Pittsburgh completed Fair Lane.

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