

# Leaky basement needn't drain wallet

The spring rains have arrived, and with them comes the fear of many homeowners: a leaky basement.

But the president of an area home improvement referral service says fixing a leaky basement doesn't have to drain your wallet.

Keith Paul, president of the Livonia-based Home Advantage Referral Service, says many types of basement water leaks can be fixed by the homeowner as long as it is caught early.

"If the leak is coming from a small crack in the basement wall or from one of the seams in cement blocks, a homeowner can usually fix it with hydraulic cement available from any hardware store," Paul said. "And if you can fix it yourself, you can definitely save a lot of money."

The first step to fixing a leak from a crack is to enlarge the crack with a mason's or ball peen hammer and a cold chisel, making sure to wear protective goggles, Paul said. Make the inside of the crack larger than the surface to secure the cement in place, but don't go deeper than three-quarters of an inch.

Next, clean the area with a stiff brush, then vacuum the crack to make sure there aren't any loose particles. Moisten the crack lightly with a sponge or damp cloth and fill the area with hydraulic cement, using a trowel to

press the cement into the crack. The cement will harden in a few minutes and expand when it dries, bonding tightly with the existing cement. Apply a second coat of cement after the first coat hardens to ensure the crack is sealed tightly.

"Once it hardens, the leak should stop. Obviously, more severe problems would require contracting a company that specializes in repairs of basement leaks, but it's good to try and fix it yourself if you can."

Paul's company, Home Advantage, is a free referral service that specializes in referring honest home improvement contractors in metro Detroit. His company has developed a network of local contractors, and Paul screens and checks their references, licenses and insurance and continually monitors their workmanship to ensure they are honest and reliable.

Following some simple rules can help homeowners avoid the pain of using a dishonest contractor, Paul said. He offers these seven steps to help protect homeowners:

**1. Ask for references.** By doing this, homeowners receive valuable information about the contractor's workmanship. Ask the references questions such as, "How was the quality of the work?" and "Would you use the contractor

again?"

**2. Check for insurance.** Make sure the contractor has valid insurance. If the contractor doesn't, and one of the workers is injured on your property, you could end up paying the medical bills.

**3. Ask for a written guarantee.** This step is very important in case there is a discrepancy regarding workmanship or cost overruns. Get a written, detailed cost analysis before your project begins to prevent problems between you and your contractor.

**4. Request a project completion schedule.** Asking the contractor for a schedule that explains the tasks and timeframes for the project will help minimize construction delays.

**5. Don't pay everything in advance.** The only time a contractor needs money in advance is when he orders a custom, non-refundable item for your project. Never pay more than

20 percent up front. Paying for work as it is completed helps ensure the work will be completed to your specifications.

**6. Don't pick up the permit.** Having the contractor pick up the building permit from your city or township serves two purposes. First, when the contractor picks up the permit from the city, it is proof that the contractor's building license is valid. Second, if there is a problem with the quality of the workmanship, you can track the company by its license.

**7. Make your last payment after you receive a waiver of lien.** A waiver of lien is a document from the contractor's supply company indicating that all your materials have been paid. If your contractor doesn't pay for your materials, then you could be held liable for the debt.

For more information, call Home Advantage at (800) 733-3778.

## Rug construction topic of meeting

A comprehensive analysis of what makes a good, better or best rug will take place at a meeting of the Detroit Oriental Rug Society 7 p.m. Thursday, May 23, at the Royal Oak Public Library.

New and old rugs will be compared.

Aspects of wool, construction, dyes and age will be discussed in detail. Guest presenter will be Nick Pool of Muskegon, whose collection has been exhibited at several museums throughout the United States.

Call (810) 541-1470 for information.

## STATUARY



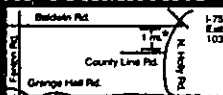
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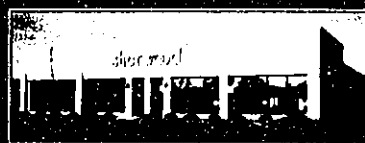
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