



# Universal Design

## Housing Solutions for All Ages and Abilities

### Hiring a Contractor

If you have decided to make modifications to your home that are significant or require specialized skill, you may want to hire a contractor to do the work. A general contractor will take charge of the project, ordering materials, getting necessary building permits, and hiring subcontractors or workers as needed. Subcontractors can be hired to do part of the work, but in this case, you or a family member will become the general contractor with all the responsibility of ordering materials and scheduling work.

To have a satisfactory experience with a contractor, hire one with a good reputation and spell out, in writing, all the parts of the contract. It is a good idea to talk with and get estimates from more than one contractor or firm. Get referrals from friends or neighbors. Read and answer the questions on the Checklist for Hiring a Contractor<sup>1</sup>. If your project and finances lend themselves to hiring a contractor, consider these points:

- Get recommendations from friends or neighbors who have had similar work

done. Home improvement stores often have installation services available or have a list of recommended installers. When buying supplies and equipment, check on store sources.

- Hire a licensed and bonded contractor.
- Ask the contractor for references and *check* the references before signing a contract.
- Check with your local Better Business Bureau or your city/county Consumer Affairs Office regarding the contractor's reliability and performance record.

Once you have hired a contractor consider the following suggestions:

- Get everything in writing. Only sign a contract after thoroughly reading it and be sure that you are comfortable with the language. You have the right to modify the contract wording to meet your expectations before you sign it. The contractor must then initial changes for the contract to be binding.
- Ask that the contractor and any subcontractors certify that they are covered by Workers Compensation, prop-

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<sup>1</sup> See the "Checklist for Hiring a Contractor" included in this resource packet.

erty damage insurance, and personal and product liability insurance.

- Write down features you would like before signing a contract or beginning construction. Have the contractor figure the cost of these features into his or her price to complete the project to *your* specifications. Agree on a maximum price that you will have to pay and put that in the contract.
- Be sure that starting and completion dates are in the contract.
- Do NOT pay the whole fee in advance; other than an initial retainer fee, pay only after certain work is completed.
- Do NOT sign a “work completed” certificate before you get proof that the contractor has paid all of the bills owed to your project. Sign a “lien wavers” document or include a liability release clause in the contract to get relieved of liability for bills that should have been paid for by the contractor for work on your job. There are many sad stories told by those who paid twice for much of the work, because the contractor did not pay the bills with the payments made to him or her by the homeowner.
- As any building or home renovation project progresses, you may decide to make additions or changes to the original plans. Put items in writing and agree on a cost. Both you and the

contractor should sign the “change order.”

- Have your contractor agree to accept final payment due 30 days after completion of the job. This allows for inspection of the job and possible corrections of omissions or mistakes. Remember before signing off on the project to carefully inspect the work and be sure it is completed to your satisfaction.

### Authors

*Universal Design Community Education Project*—a collaboration of The Ohio State University Colleges of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, and Human Ecology, the OSU School of Allied Medical Professions, and The Ohio Department of Aging.

*Partnering Sponsor*—Lowe’s Home Improvement Warehouse.

### Sources

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