

Home improvements costing \$5000 or less checklist

Get at least three quotes on the same detailed description of the job

Check the registration or licensing, reputation and references of any handyman or tradesperson you are considering

Make sure you have a written contract for all work, even small jobs, which clearly specifies the work to be done and the total cost. Put any agreed changes in writing

Before work starts, check with your home and contents policy insurer that you are covered for the renovations. You may need extra cover

Be wary of people who knock on your door or who telephone you unexpectedly, offering cheap deals on jobs around your home. They may be travelling con men.

Who has to be registered or licensed?

- **Demolition, re-stumping, re-blocking and structural work** must be done by registered building practitioners.
- **Plumbers, gasfitters and drainers** must be registered or licensed with the Plumbing Industry Commission to perform plumbing work, carry an identification card from the Commission, and provide you with a compliance certificate for work over \$750, or for gas fitting and work to below-ground sewer drains regardless of the value of the work.
- **Electricians** must be licensed with Energy Safe Victoria and issue you with Certificates of Electrical Safety for all work on domestic premises. They should carry an identification card with their licence details.
- **If you are doing any structural work to a building**, then the builder or tradesperson must be registered, regardless of the cost of the work, and you will require a building permit – check with your building surveyor. Refer to the Building Commission for more details, including to check a builder's registration.

You do not have to use a registered building practitioner for work that involves only **one** of these tasks:

- plastering
- tiling, including wall and floor
- electrical work (but the electrician must still be licensed)

- glazing
- installing floor coverings
- insulating
- painting
- plumbing, gas-fitting and draining (but the tradesperson must still be registered or licensed with the Plumbing Industry Commission)
- attaching external fixtures – awnings, security screens, insect screens and balustrades
- erecting a chain wire fence around a tennis court
- erecting a mast, pole, antenna, aerial or similar structure.

Note: A tradesperson who uses more than one of the above skills, such as plastering and painting, must be registered with the Building Practitioners Board if the total cost of the work is more than \$5000.

Make sure you have a written contract with the tradesperson that clearly specifies the work to be done and the total cost.

Choosing a supplier

Decide exactly what you want and describe it in detail – right down to the make and model number of any fittings. Ensure they are available when required by the builder.

Contact your local council to find out if the work will need permits. As the home owner, it is your responsibility to make sure planning and building permits are obtained.

Get recommendations: ask family or friends to recommend someone they have recently used, or contact industry organisations.

Get at least three quotes on the same detailed description of the job.

Understand exactly what the quotes cover – the cheapest may not include some items, or only give a base rate that does not cover the cost of the actual materials and finishes you want.

Get and check the tradesperson's details. Ask for their:

full name, not just their first name

physical address (not a post office box)

registered business name

licence or registration details (if their trade is licensed or they are a registered building practitioner)

Ask to see a certificate of currency for public liability insurance, which will protect you or third parties against any damage the workers may cause.

Check references and inspect work they have done. Questions to ask the referees include:

did the tradesperson start and finish on time?

did the tradesperson communicate regularly and clearly with them about changes or quality of work?

did the price increase? Was this reasonable and agreed to?

were they satisfied with the quality of the tradesperson's work?

It is crucial that you maintain good communication with the person doing the job – decide whether you can work well with the person you choose.

Deposits and other payments

- Never pay the full amount up-front.
- Your deposit should be no more than 10 per cent of the total price for jobs worth less than \$20,000 (and no more than five per cent for work costing \$20,000 or more).
- Do not make progress payments or final payment until you are satisfied all work required in your contract has been completed and is free of defects.

Checking work

You can pay an independent building consultant to check for defects or unfinished work. If you have concerns:

make a list of any work that you believe is faulty or incomplete

speak with your builder immediately about your concerns

put your request and any agreements made with the builder or tradesperson to finish work in writing, and send it to them by registered post.