

Hiring a Handyman

in Pennsylvania



AMERICAN HOME
Handyman

by James E. Laero

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It's inevitable; doors jam, faucets leak, and paint fades.

If you own a home, you know the challenge of keeping it all together.

Homeowners with a lot of spare time and some skill with tools and materials can do some of the work themselves, but not practical for most homeowners with a busy lifestyles.

Enter the home handyman - a multi-skilled home repair, maintenance and modification expert.

However not all handyman services are created equal. You are inviting someone into your home that you do not know. This makes choosing a home handyman a very intimate process. Trust is no small matter when you open your door to bring someone into your house for repairs, maintenance or remodeling. It's YOUR home. It's your private space.

We hope the following suggestions will help you save time and choose wisely.



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Hiring a Handyman in Pennsylvania
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This book is not intended as a substitute for the legal advice of an attorney. The reader should consult an attorney in matters relating to his/her actions in regards to entering into contractual agreements and dispute resolutions.

Visit our website at: www.americanhomehandyman.com



Before You Call a Handyman

Homes require constant maintenance. Even newly constructed homes need adjustments and corrections as the new home settles after construction. Your home, as it becomes older, will require servicing more often. A well maintained home should last indefinitely and hold its curb-appeal and resale value. Those small jobs around the house can pile up fast if left neglected. Developing a good relationship with a handyman company is as important as keeping your homeowner’s insurance up to date. The first phase of building a good relationship with a home handyman is to find a quality handyman service you can rely on. Step one - do your homework.

Do Your Research

Image - Review the company website & marketing materials.

You can tell a lot about a company’s approach to business by both the quality of their website’s communication and the customer-focused information offered. Good websites are not inexpensive. Companies that invest in a professional website and communication resources do so because they care about their image and first impressions. They also care about giving potential customers enough information to afford a comfortable, intelligent decision. The image that any business puts forth through a website and marketing resources reflects their attitude towards excellence. It’s a good first indicator of professionalism.

Review Capabilities

Check out the company’s capabilities, trade related experience and experience with your type of project. Handyman work involves a variety of home care trades. It takes years of experience to gain the skills necessary to master the carpentry, plumbing, electrical, painting and landscape trades involved in home care and improvement. Be sure the company has the trade experience that your project requires.



Did You Know

The Handyman Services market in the United States has been estimated to be a \$126 billion industry and increases by about 4% annually.



Review Referrals

Check the company's online customer reviews.
(Call the company if you need more reassurance and ask for actual customer phone numbers and call them.)

Check for Registrations and Certifications

Pennsylvania Registration:

Pennsylvania requires contractors who do more than \$5,000.00 of work per year to be **insured and registered with the state of PA**. Be very thorough in your investigation of the handyman's registration status. Here are three websites to check any Pennsylvania handyman company:

Info on Pennsylvania Contractor's certification:
<http://www.hicpacompliance.com/hicpa.aspx>

Info on Pennsylvania Consumer information:
https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/Consumers/Home_Improvement_Consumer_Information/

Info on a Contractor's registration:
<http://hicsearch.attorneygeneral.gov/>



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
Bureau of Consumer Protection
15th Floor Strawberry Square
Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone: (717) 772-2425
<http://www.attorneygeneral.gov>

Did You Know

A contractor's Pennsylvania registration number must be included in any advertisements, contracts, estimates and proposals used in Pennsylvania.

Anyone who presents themselves as a contractor in the State of PA without being properly registered with the Office of the Attorney General is committing an act of fraud in the State of Pennsylvania.



Before You Hire a Handyman

Once your initial search/research is completed, and you find a handyman service that you believe can service you properly, it is time to make first contact. This is when you should collect the specifics about the service offered so that you will not be surprised or disappointed later.

Check Pricing

Get a project estimate or check on hourly labor fees for standard hours, evening hours, weekend hours and emergency hours. Most handyman/contractor services will charge higher rates for off hours and weekends. Get the rates and the time schedules related to the rates. A reputable handyman service should have these posted on their website or in handout materials.

(A savings tip: Handyman work is often time + materials. Meaning, your cost may be the costs of materials + tax + markup. Markup is charged if the contractor must personally go to a supplier to purchase and deliver supplies. Markup reflects his time, labor and costs (fuel, etc.) for this process. Handyman service providers usually have most small home repair related parts in their vehicle, but not always, especially items such as ceiling fans, lighting fixtures, etc., where the customer must select styles or colors. Often you can avoid this cost by either asking your local home center for free delivery or offering to pick up the supplies yourself, assuming the handyman is agreeable, and assuming you have the physical abilities to do so, and a vehicle to handle the pickup/delivery. In such case, you would simply ask your handyman for a concise materials list and take it to your local home center to be filled. Be sure to get exactly what your handyman requests to avoid delays in project progress.)



Ask Specific Questions

Have you ever done a project like mine?

Just because a handyman company advertises it can install a ceiling fan doesn't necessarily mean the installer has done it before. You may be the first, which may or may not be a problem. If the handyman is truly handy then the final product may be fine. But, is it worth the gamble? You will need to decide.

Are you familiar with the local zoning ordinances and building codes for my locality?

Many communities require construction and renovations to adhere to the International Building Code. You can check your local requirements by phoning your town's public works manager or zoning officer to ask if your project will require a permit?

Most localities do not require permits for handyman projects but do require them for larger building projects, even for simple jobs like installing a storage shed or small deck. A competent contractor will inform you of all the necessary permits required by your locality before starting work on your project.

Ask for References

A contractor should be able to give you names, addresses, and phone numbers of customer references. If you are not satisfied with references posted online or in the handyman's literature, ask for call-able referrals and call them. Ask specific questions. Was their project completed on time? Were they satisfied? Were there any unexpected costs? Did the service technician show up on time and clean up after finishing the job? Was he friendly? Did he communicate well?



DID YOU KNOW?

Pennsylvania has a Uniform Construction Code (UCC)

Google: "PA Uniform Construction Code"



Insurance

Ask about insurance. Request copies of insurance certificates and check to be sure it is current. If the insurance is not in order, you could be held liable for any injuries and/or damages that occur during the project.

Handyman service companies (and their subcontractors) in Pennsylvania must have:

- Personal Liability insurance;*
- Property Damage Coverage insurance; and,*
- Worker's Compensation insurance (if employing others)

*PA Registered contractors must carry insurance covering personal injury in an amount not less than \$50,000.00 and insurance covering property damaged in an amount not less than \$50,000.00.

Ask if the contractor will be using subcontractors on this project?

If the handyman uses subcontractors, make sure the subcontractors have current insurance coverage, state registrations and certifications as well. Subcontractors are required to be registered with the State of Pennsylvania just as contractors are required to be registered.



Did You Know

If a contractor's insurance has lapsed, you may never know it until it is too late. Be sure the Handyman's insurance policy is current by requesting to see a current insurance binder.



Hiring the Handyman

If your research and initial contact review went well, you are now getting closer to the formal agreement stage. Before you sign that contract there are a few more details you should iron out.

Before you sign the contract

Inquire how change orders are handled. A change order is a written authorization to the contractor to make a change or addition to the work described in the original contract, and could affect the project’s cost and schedule. For projects over \$500.00, Pennsylvania requires written change orders for anything that deviates from the original contract plans. The change order should contain the specific changes and related price changes.

Request information about warranties covering materials and workmanship, with names and addresses of who is honoring them such as; the contractor, subcontractor, a product distributor or manufacturer. What is the length of the warranty period and what are the limitations on the warranty? A professional handyman should be able to offer a warranty on workmanship for one year. In addition, many building and remodeling materials come with warranties.

Ask the handyman what the service will include. Is site clean-up and debris hauling included in the price? (Ask for a “clean-up clause” to ensure that the technician is responsible for all clean-up work.) Will the technician pick up and deliver materials? Etc.

Ask what your role will be in the process of the project. You should ask for a detailed list of all materials showing product colors, models, sizes and brands if your project is changing the visual appearance of your home. If some materials will be chosen later, the contract should say who’s responsible for choosing each item and how much money is budgeted for it (also known as an “allowance”). If you have agreed to do cleanup to save money off your total project cost be sure you ask about it up front before signing the contract. Request it be noted in the contract.



Understand Your Payment Options up front

Ask to know the handyman’s payment terms.

Handyman services are usually priced by the project or by the hour + materials. Most handyman services will require you to sign a pre-project contract for either a project cost estimate or an hourly rate + materials.

In Pennsylvania, in projects costing less than \$1,000.00, a contractor is permitted to request a down payment larger than 1/3 of the project cost, require payment for materials up front, etc. You will note below under, “Signing the Agreement,” that there are very different regulations when a project exceeds \$1000.00, in Pennsylvania. (see page 12)

In Pennsylvania, any project valued at more than \$25.00 must offer a 3-day Right of Recission waiting period. **The only exception to this is in case of an emergency.** An “emergency” is defined as:

“bona fide emergency” means any condition existing on the buyer’s residential real property which renders or has the capability to render the residential real property uninhabitable. The term includes, but shall not be limited to, conditions significantly affecting the heating system, electrical system, plumbing system, ventilation system, roof or outer walls of the residential real property.

In such an emergency the homeowner is required to sign an Emergency Work Authorization form to be supplied by the contractor.

For more information refer to [PA 1968 Act 387, Section 7 at the Pennsylvania General Assembly website.](#)



Interesting Report

A Wall Street Journal reporting team did an informal assessment by hiring “handymen all over the country and asked them to fix a wide range of problems, from a relatively routine leaky faucet to a sticky door.” One quote was ten times as large as another was. Further, the reporter concluded “A big corporate name is no guarantee of quality or speedy service.” One national corporate firm took three weeks to fix a stuck door.



Signing the Agreement

Finally, you are to the formal agreement. As a Pennsylvania homeowner, there are some very important issues to be considered for both legal compliance and your safety. There are two regulatory areas that a contractor must comply with in signing a contract to do your project. These are Pennsylvania Contract regulations. The two forms are (1) Service Call Agreement, and (2) Project Contract.



Service Call Agreement

In Pennsylvania, a handyman visit for small repairs and replacements valued under \$500.00 can be considered a service call. Service calls do not require lengthy contracts, but a pre-project contract or service call agreement is still advisable. At the very least, the agreement/contract should:

- Show the PA State registration number of the contractor;
- Note the date of the contract transaction;
- Contain contact information of the contractor;
- Offers general description of the work to be conducted;
- Be signed by you (or the property owner) and the contractor or a qualified sales representative of the contractor; and,
- Shows the minimum cost of the service call and/or estimated cost of the project, plus any down payment required.
- Any project valued over \$25.00 in PA should give you a three (3) day Right of Rescission to cancel before the project begins.

Scam Alert

When you first meet with the contractor, he's very agreeable about doing everything exactly to your specifications and even suggests his own extra touches and upgrades. Some of the details don't make it into the contract agreement, but you figure it doesn't matter because you had such a clear verbal understanding. Soon, you notice that the extras you'd discussed aren't being built. When you confront the contractor, he tells you that he didn't include those features in his price, so you'll have to live without them or pony up additional money to redo the work. Get everything in the contract!

From: houselogic.com



Project Contract

In Pennsylvania, a project cost of more than \$500.00 requires a Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act (HICPA) compliant contract. In addition, for a contract of \$1,000.00 or more, the contractor cannot accept a deposit in excess of 1/3 of the contract price, or 1/3 of the contract price plus the cost of special order materials. For more information see the Pennsylvania Home Improvement Consumer Protection Act (HICPA). The contract should be clear and concise and include who, what, where, when, and cost of your project. Before you sign a contract, make sure the contract:

- Shows the PA State registration number of the contractor;
- Notes the date of the contract transaction;
- Contains clear contact information of the contractor;
- Shows the total sales price and any down payments required plus, listed separately, any amount advanced for special-order materials;
- Notes an approximate start and completion date;
- Offers a clear description of the work to be conducted, the materials to be used and a set of detailed specifications;
- Includes the names, addresses, telephone numbers and State of PA registration numbers of all subcontractors (if any) on the project;
- Promises that the contractor agrees to maintain insurance and identifies the current amount of the contractor’s insurance coverage;
- Complies properly with current PA HICPA regulations;
- Includes a notice to the customer of the 3-day Right of Rescission;
- Makes note that the contract is the entire agreement; and,
- Be sure it is signed by you (or the property owner) and the contractor or a qualified sales representative of the contractor.



Important Tip

If a contractor is offering you a price far below other contractor’s estimates, you may want to see if the contractor has disclosed honest facts about his eligibility in the state of Pennsylvania, current insurance, or his intent to follow standard building practices and use quality materials.



During the Project

When the project begins, you should hope for the best and protect yourself from the worst. Meaning - you should hope you never need to confront a technician over issues which you are dissatisfied with, but you should always be in a position to do so if necessary.

Keep Records

Keep all paperwork related to your project in one place for at least 1 year. This includes:

- Copy of the contract/service agreement;
- Change orders;
- Any correspondence with your home improvement professionals;
- A record of all payments. You may need receipts for tax purposes;
- Warranties;
- Guarantees; and,
- Material Safety Data Sheets (if provided).

Keep a Journal

Keep a log or journal of all phone calls, conversations, and activities. You also might want to take photographs as the job progresses. These records are especially important if you have problems with your project during or after construction.

A note of advice: no one, especially a tradesman, is comfortable having a person jotting notes and taking photos while they are working. And no one likes to work in an atmosphere of suspicion. Consider taking photos at the end of a work day after the team has departed.



Stay positive and communicate

Home repair, maintenance and modification work can be a very high stress process for any homeowner. If the process starts to bother you, don't sit on the porch and stew - take time to calmly let the technician know what is irritating you. Professional handyman service technicians should be willing to do everything in their power to keep the entire process as stress free as possible.

Work Change Orders

Often during the course of any project, unforeseen issues can arise that require a change of plans, additional materials and labor, etc. Or a homeowner may just decide to change or add something to the work previously agreed to in the original contract. In Pennsylvania, such changes must always be handled through a formal Work Change Order in writing.



Reducing Stress

One of the best ways to reduce stress on you, your family and your home during home repairs and renovations is to discuss with your service person the possibility of sealing off the rest of your house from the project area to reduce dust and noise.



Before You Sign-off

When your project concludes and before you sign-off on the agreement, there are important steps to take to ensure your long-term satisfaction. Now it is time to carefully review the project results and the surrounding surfaces for issues.

Create a “Punch List”

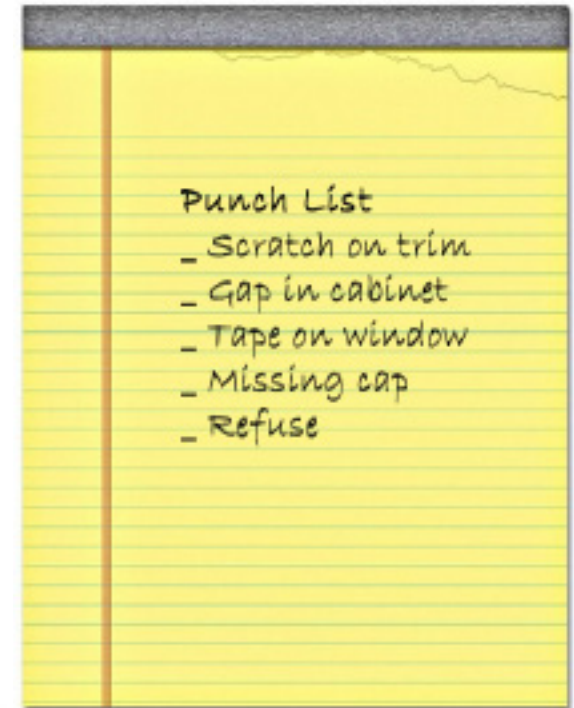
Review the final product carefully with your technician and make (or permit the technician to make) a detailed list of anything you would like to have checked, changed or fixed. Review the list with your technician and have the technician check off when each item is completed.

Sign-off Wisely

Don’t make the final payment or sign a final release until you are reasonably satisfied. Reasonably satisfied, means that the contract or service agreement is completed as it was originally written. Reasonably satisfied, does not mean that you have changed your mind about a paint color or style of cabinet you chose. If you change your mind about a styles or colors, you can request a formal change-order and receive pricing accordingly.

Before the final payment and sign-off be sure:

- The project site has been properly cleaned and cleared of debris, materials; equipment and tools;
- The finished work reflects what was agreed to in the contract;
- You have received written warranties/guarantees for materials and workmanship if offered;
- You have carefully inspected and approved all of the completed work and surrounding surfaces. (Addresses any damaged surfaces or issues you have BEFORE you sign off.); and,
- You have tested the final product if possible (for instance, flush that new commode twice before the handyman who installed it leaves).



After the Project

What to do if you are not satisfied

In the event of a disputed final payment there are laws in Pennsylvania to protect both homeowners from negligent contractors and contractors from non-paying customers. Unfortunately the cost to the homeowner can include a judgment or a mechanics lien on property until a court decides the liability. If you've done your homework and hired a reputable handyman this should not be an issue. No sincere handyman wants to create a bad reference. If you have a dispute with the work, explain the issue(s) calmly and give your handyman an opportunity to respond. If you have hired a reputable handyman the issue will be cared for properly. If not, do not feel intimidated. It's your house. If you are not satisfied, continue to pursue resolution. Consider the following steps in progression:

1. Voice your concerns in person as quickly as you can. If the project is still ongoing tell the technician of your concerns. It is often simpler to correct an issue before other work is placed on or around it;
2. If you find an issue after the service technician leaves, be sure to report it clearly and in writing to the company ASAP and absolutely before 7 days pass.;
3. If you do not get a response within 5 days, send a notice of your issue(s) via certified mail to the company;
4. If you get no reasonable response at this point, inform the contractor that you will be forced to execute the next two steps;
5. If you still do not get a response after a week you can either contact a lawyer for assistance or contact the Pennsylvania State Attorney General's Office for assistance; and,
6. Consider posting your complaint to any number of the online contractor review sites. If that gets a response, and your issues are rectified, consider updating/ revising your online posts. But that would of course be your choice. (A word of caution here... under federal law — 47 U.S.C. § 230, websites like Angie's List are shielded from being sued for defamation, but the writers — homeowners who write reviews — are legally responsible for what they write and lawsuits can be filed against them. One such lawsuit in 2006 cost a woman who posted to an Internet message board more than \$11 million in damages.*)

*TIME MAGAZINE: www.time.com "Online Reviewers Beware: You Can Get Sued," 1/7/2013



Important Tip

In any home repair or renovation your best defense against dissatisfaction is the Service Agreement or Project Contract. Don't let yourself be rushed through that phase. Take your time to think through what you want in detail and get it in the agreement in writing.



How to reward a job well done

If your handyman has serviced you well you can express your gratitude in several ways that are helpful.

- Write a personal letter/note of thanks (or e-mail) and let the company know about your appreciation. Everyone is encouraged to get such a communication.
- Post an online review of your handyman to any one of the many review sites out there. Those types of referrals are very important to a handyman.
- Spread the word about your handyman to family, friends and coworkers.

Showing your appreciation in this way is truly valuable to your handyman both in a business sense and on a personal level. In the end the relationship you build can only serve to ensure you and your home access to reliable handyman services long into the future.



About the Author, James Laero, / American Home Handyman

American Home Handyman traces its roots back to the end of WW2 when Mr. Frank Laero Sr., used his GI Bill following his service in the US Navy to train for the carpentry, plumbing and electric trades. In the mid 1960's he started taking his sons along with him to service customers. Frank's skill in the trades and his dedication to customer service earned him the respect and loyalty of his customers. In 1978, Frank's eldest son, Jim, took over the family business and in 2003 he renamed the company, American Home Handyman, in honor of his father's love, dedication and service to his country.

Mr. James Laero, holds more than 30 years experience in the construction trades. During his career in the trades he worked for one of the top 100 largest design remodeling firms in the nation and with one of the Pittsburgh Business Times Top 100 Fastest Growing engineering and architectural firms in the Southwest Pennsylvania region.

Jim's continued vision for American Home Handyman was passed down to him from his father, who stressed exemplary personal service to his clients and a strict adherence to quality of the final product. This foundation is at the core of American Home Handyman.

It would be our honor to service your home repair, remodeling and modification needs.

American Home Handyman is based in Canonsburg, Washington County, PA and serves the communities throughout Washington County, PA.

phone **724.771.3912**
e-mail service@yourdoors.com
website www.AmericanHomeHandyman.com



I hope the information in this book helps to relieve you of some of the challenges involved in hiring a home handyman. If I can be of any help please give me a call.

Jim Laero

Owner
American Home Handyman



AMERICAN HOME Handyman

Just the Help You Need

- 30+ Years Experience in the Trades
- PA State Registered
- Fully Insured
- Satisfaction Guaranteed
- Friendly Office Staff
- Friendly & Skilled Technicians
- References
- Locally owned and operated

Serving the communities of Washington County, PA.

Reasonable Hourly Rates or Fixed Project Costs

Emergency, evening and weekend rates available.

Call our friendly staff at **724.771.3912**

