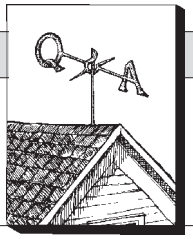

Diversifying Into Home Inspection

by Henry Spies

Training for Home Inspection

Q. *I am a contractor hoping to diversify into the home inspection business. What would be the best way to gain the necessary education and proper certification?*

A. At this point, Texas is the only state that requires certification for home inspectors. Compliance must be handled through the state housing board. But for general information and training there are several home inspection organizations. The largest is the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI, 3299 K St. NW, 7th floor, Washington, DC 20007; 202/842-3096). ASHI's *Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics* is widely accepted among home inspectors. Other training opportunities include the Property Inspectors Training Institute (8811 Stonehaven Court, Potomac, MD 20854; 301/983-9371), which offers a week-long residential inspection course several times a year, and Home-Tech Systems, Inc. (5161 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20186; 301/657-3133), which periodically offers a course in starting a home inspection business.

There are also several home inspection franchise organizations that offer training to members. Perhaps the largest of these affiliate networks is HomePro Systems, Inc. (2841 Hartland Road, Falls Church, VA 22043; 800/966-4555). Home-Chek of America (120-A E. Broad St., Falls Church, VA 22046; 800/451-1702) also has excellent courses on mechanical systems that are sometimes open to nonmembers.

Other franchise groups include the Inspection Experts (2263 NW 2nd Ave., Suite 110, Boca Raton FL; 800/226-6299), which offers courses in several cities during the year. Inspection Training Associates (410 S. Santa Fe, Vista, CA; 800/323-9235) offers a 12-hour home study course on video, as well as two residential courses that are accredited by the state of California.

An excellent book on the subject is *The Complete Book of Home Inspection* by Norman Becker (McGraw-Hill, New York; 1980).

Specialized Stripper

Q. *What is the best way to remove mastic-adhered ceramic tiles from plywood without ruining the subfloor?*

A. I would try an electric floor stripper with a tile blade to remove the tile, then a spring steel blade to scrape off as much of the mastic as possible. An electric floor stripper is a rather specialized tool, but it can usually be rented from a tool rental company, or from the floor covering supplier.

Aluminum Wiring

Q. *I had never seen aluminum wiring before I encountered it on a recent remodel. Is aluminum compatible with copper wiring? Should the aluminum wiring be replaced?*

A. Aluminum wire is fairly common in industrial installations, but has not been used in residential work for a number of years. Aluminum is a good conductor of electricity, but not quite as good as copper. Aluminum is cheaper, lighter in weight, and easier to bend than copper. But problems can occur when aluminum is exposed to air, and aluminum oxide — a very poor conductor — forms on the surface. In industrial installations, a grease-like coating is often applied to connections to prevent oxidation. In addition, aluminum wire must be connected to bus bars at the panel and to specially designed switch and outlet devices. Ordinary residential wiring devices cannot be used. Any oxidized connection will create high-resistance, which generates heat. This can lead to fires in breaker, switch, and outlet boxes.

Floor Insulation Over Slabs

Q. *We are remodeling a basement apartment and want to lay a wide plank floor on sleepers over a slab. What is the best way to insulate the floor? Should we install a vapor barrier? If so, where?*

A. If the slab is well-insulated along the perimeter, no further insulation should be needed. Otherwise, any insulation between the sleepers will do. If your sleepers aren't very deep, you may want to use rigid foam insulation to get the most R-value. The insulation should be installed around the perimeter of the room at least 2-feet in from the outside walls. It should not be necessary in the middle of the floor. A vapor retarder should be installed beneath the floor. The easiest way to install it is to lay a sheet of polyethylene over the sleepers before installing the subfloor. ■

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