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How Do I Comply With The Law?

Zoning regulations differ from place to place. If you are planning any alterations or additions to your home, you or your remodeler should check with the zoning authorities to determine whether the anticipated changes are legal and to find out what permits or permission you need to proceed with the project.

Building codes are established by most cities, towns and counties and vary considerably from one jurisdiction to another. Your contract should call for the work to be performed in accordance with all applicable building codes. Keep in mind that building codes only set minimum safety standards for construction; they do not protect you against poor workmanship.

As a general rule, a building permit is required whenever structural work is involved or when the basic living area of a home is to be changed. For example, if you have a home with an unfinished basement and would like to finish off a portion of it for a family room, you would need a building permit in most jurisdictions because you have changed the basic amount of living space in your house by converting storage space to "livable" space. In some cases, separate permits for electrical, heating and plumbing work may be required.

The remodeler should obtain the necessary building permits. Spell out this requirement in your contract because you could be held legally responsible for failure to obtain the required permits. The remodeler should obtain the permits because the person who does that is considered to be the contractor and that person is liable if the work does not comply with the building codes.

When a government agency issues a permit for home improvement work, a representative will inspect the work when it reaches a certain stage and/or when it is completed to make sure it complies with various codes and regulations. The remodeler is responsible for calling for these inspections.