

Take proper precautions for home projects

By JAMES CLARK
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If you have a home improvement project in mind this time of year, attorney Ryan J. Moore has a few tips for homeowners to consider.

"Never pay the contractor in full until the job is done," said Moore. "This may seem like common sense, but you'd be surprised at how many people pay in full for the entire job up front."

Moore recommends paying incrementally as work is finished. He also suggests having a contract in writing to eliminate confusion from either party.

"It's good to have in writing the scope of the work that is to be completed," said Moore, who has a background in the building supply business. "That includes what grade of materials are to be used and you can also specify the amount of time that's being allowed to do the job. Just saying a reasonable amount of time can be open for interpretation."

Moore says it's also smart to ask the person for references and to make sure they are carrying insurance, both liability and workman's compensation. Liability is valuable for any damages that might occur to your property by the person doing repairs. Workman's compensation will help protect the property owner if an employee is hurt in an on-the-job accident while performing work.

Moore also reminds homeowners that a handyman is required to have a general contractor's



RYAN J. MOORE

license if the cost of the project - labor and materials - is more than \$25,000.

If you're looking at buying a new home this spring, Moore says title insurance is a valuable investment. He says this protects the buyer in a number of ways. This includes protection against: unpaid taxes, forged documents, legal mistakes, and invalid divorces.

"Title insurance is great protection for the homeowner and a lot of banks are now requiring it," said Moore. "It's a one-time premium that's based on the amount of the home."

Moore said the fee for title insurance for a \$100,000 home is \$375. He said the title insurance will cover all legal costs associated with a dispute, and also cover any expenses should the person lose the dispute.

For additional advice on buying or improving property, Moore can be reached at 474-7926. His office is located at 115 N. Spring Street.



Outdoor firepits are a relatively new trend that continue to grow in popularity.

Firepits can offer relaxing setting for outdoor socializing

People have sat around an open fire outdoors for centuries. Not only does fire provide warmth and light, but also it offers a relaxing setting for conversation and socialization.

The outdoor fire pit has transformed the concept of backyard entertaining. Homeowners understand how a fire pit can add value to a home and make their yard an inviting place to be on a summer evening or a chilly autumn night.

Outdoor fire pits are a relatively new creation that continue to grow in popularity. Once available strictly through specialty retailers, fire pits can now be found on the shelves of many home improvement and big box stores as well as online.

Fire pits can add a lot to a home's exterior entertaining area. Some fire pit styles and materials will last longer than others. Homeowners should assess their needs and the space available before choosing a fire pit for their home.

First, homeowners must decide if they want a permanent or portable fire pit. If you are ready to make an enduring change to your yard and landscape, then a permanent fire pit is the way to go. These can be made of stone or brick and are often very durable. Permanent fire pits can be incorporated into landscape designs to create a professional patio look. They're also some of the safer types of fire pits because they cannot be knocked over and the bricks or retaining wall construction provide a barrier around the fire.

Portable fire pits are freestanding units that can be moved around the yard on a whim. They also can be loaded into the car and taken to a neighbor's house or even to the beach. Portable fire pits are less expensive than permanent models, and some homeowners prefer a trial run with a portable pit before deciding to install a permanent structure.

Portable fire pits are made of metal and usu-

ally coated with a fire-proof paint. Over time, exposure to the elements can cause the metal to rust or weaken, something homeowners should consider prior to purchase.

Homeowners also must consider a fuel source. Wood is a common fuel source for fire pits. Wood can be inexpensive, especially when gathered from around the yard. However, a wood-burning fire will constantly have to be fed with new branches. If you want to have a roaring fire but don't want to maintain it, then a gas-fueled fire pit is better. Natural gas fire pits can run off of a portable propane tank (think barbecue tank) or be directly connected to a home's natural gas supply.

Now you can decide on the style. Gas fire pits will give you a greater number of design options, but there are still plenty of choices with wood fire pits. From bowl-shaped pits to rectangular-shaped pits to barrel-style pits to

chimineas, there are designs to fit most preferences and size constraints.

Once you have chosen a fire pit, safety should prevail. Here are some tips to consider.

- Keep the fire pit away from the home and objects that can burn. Maintain a safe distance from the fire pit at all times.

- The best place to have the fire pit is on hard stone, cement or tile. Portable fire pits can be placed on patio stones in the lawn.

- Use a screen to keep embers and sparks from escaping during use.

- Keep children a good distance away from the fire pit and always supervise when the pit is in use.

- Make sure the fire is completely extinguished before going in for the night.

- Do not use any accelerants to make the fire bigger or light faster.

- Buy a vinyl cover to protect the fire pit from the elements when not in use.

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TERMITE PREVENTION TIPS

Unlike other pests, termites are pests whose detection and removal is best left to a professional who can recognize the subtle signs. He or she will identify certain signs of an infestation, such as mud-wings from a swarm, piles of sawdust, termite tubes

running outdoors from the soil to a home, buckling paint, and other indications.

There are different ways to prevent or treat a termite infestation. To prevent termites, there are applications of termiticides that are put into the soil surrounding a home or structure. Also, removal

of moisture in and around the house is key because termites need moist conditions for survival. Poisoning of nests is also a treatment option.

If termites already have infiltrated a home, fumigation may be necessary to remedy that problem. However, fumigation is not always effective at killing eggs and all of the termites. Most exterminators will use a combination of treatments to rid a home of termites.

If extreme wood damage has occurred, portions of the structure may have to be removed and rebuilt. This also may help alleviate some of the scent trails termites use to travel to and from nests and food sources.

Here are some tips to prevent a termite problem.

- Don't store firewood in contact with the ground.
- Use chemically treated wood for building structures.
- Disguise wood by painting it or using a shellac or varnish. Termites may not like the taste of treated wood.



Getting rid of termites usually requires the help of a professional termite exterminator.

- Prevent hidden entry points where termites can go unseen.

- Remove cardboard, newspaper, cotton materials and any other cellulose from the floor.

- Vent kitchens and baths so that they will not trap moisture.

- Fix any and all water leaks.

- Don't plant gardens or put soil directly against a home's exterior walls.

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