

BUILDERS POINT OF VIEW

ARE YOU PREPARED?

By Alex Guthrie

I try to warn my clients about the inconvenience, noise, loss of privacy, and unpredictability of a remodel. The knock on the door when you don't expect it, the lack of a knock on the door when you need it. I tell them that their schedule and lifestyle will be interrupted and disrupted. But sometimes I just can't get the message through, I guess it's sort of like seeing a tornado, it looks pretty bad on TV doesn't it, well it looks real different up close.

The stories I hear from people range from hilarious to downright sad and are usually only funny after the project is over. Living through a remodel can be a nightmare if you're not prepared. You have to be ready for issues that range from security to privacy to inconvenience and safety. You will change some habits and you will develop some new ones. Here are some ideas to throw at your contractor.

Common sense should tell us that when we have strangers in our house on a daily basis, we might want to exercise a little caution as it relates to our security. I had a client that was in the habit of coming in the front door and hanging her purse in the front entry, the problem was that it was the same entry all the workmen had to use. Although we knew most of the guys and trusted them without question, the reality is that there is always someone coming and going that we don't know, a delivery person, or even a service person. Now, we would like to think everyone's as honest as we are but that's just not always the case. We quickly convinced our client to relocate her purse to a more secure place.

Houses that are under construction are prime targets for thieves, they know that the workmen don't know everyone coming and going and they know when no one is home. The workmen are only there certain times of the day and need to have access in order to do their jobs. We do everything from putting lockboxes on the front door (the kind the realtors use) to having one of our employees meet the subs and let them in. Still you must remember these thieves are professionals and opportunists, they steal for a living. I introduce myself to the neighbors and leave them a business card and I encourage them to call me if they see anything suspicious. I appreciate it if they call if there are other problems such as trash or noise. It's not a bad idea to let your neighborhood co-op know what your doing.

We are constantly setting off security and smoke alarms. One unfortunate plumber set off a silent alarm while working on one my projects. When he existed the front door to get some tools from his truck he was greeted by several policemen with guns drawn commanding him to "Drop the wrench buddy!!". The poor guy didn't even know he had set off the alarm. He complied. Most alarm systems allow you to set a temporary code so you don't have to give out your personal code, if the contractor sets off a false alarm then he can pay the fine.

Since they are primarily particle detectors, smoke and fire alarms can be easily activated by dust floating in the air and the fire department will fine you after a certain number of false alarms. Your contractor can purchase dust covers for these devices and install them while working; it is imperative that the covers be removed at the end of each day.

If you are not going to live in the house but you're planning on storing personal items there; it is a good idea to designate a closet or room and change the door knob to a keyed lockset or a deadbolt that only one person has a key to. This room is off limits to anyone but you. I will also have my clients store any purchased items such as plumbing or electrical fixtures in this or some other secure place.

Privacy is the one thing that is hard to maintain when people are working in your home. If you are going to stay in the home while it is being worked on, designate an off limits area; an area that only your family has access to. Do not allow workmen in this area unless absolutely necessary and only with your permission. Make sure they remove their shoes and clean up after they're finished.

We frequently post signs on the front door of our projects directing anyone associated with the project not to disturb the occupants, this sign has the pertinent phone numbers to reach the superintendent or our office for deliveries or questions.

Ask your contractor what can be done to minimize the dust and noise. Placing a standard air filter over the return air grills in the house will make a huge difference in the amount of dust that is spread through the air. Sweeping the floor and cleaning daily really does help with this, are you budgeted for daily clean up. Be aware of the low flash point of sawdust; a spark or carelessly discarded cigarette butt can quickly ignite this material.

Parking can be a problem and an unnecessary inconvenience for you and your neighbors. Ask the workman to park on one side of the street and leave the driveway clear. Something about concrete driveways seems to bring out the oil drops in workmen's trucks. Remember to be sensitive to your neighbors on this one; you have to live with them long after the workers are gone.

A little common sense and preparedness can make the difference and save a relationship.