

Hire a pro to install an intercom system

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Published on: 04/14/04

Q: How much trouble would it be to install an intercom system in a two-story house with full basement that has already been built?

Also, when putting insulation in an attic are there any areas to avoid such as around can lights or those vents in the overhang?

We have a bathroom that has a constant odor from the shower. One plumber came out to look at it and said we should put a thick type of Drano in it, charged us \$85 and left. All we got was advice. He didn't even put that Drano in. Do you have any other ideas for getting rid of odors like this?

— **Eddie Rhoades, e-mail**

A: The difficulty of installing an intercom system depends on how many rooms you want to serve. Traditionally, installation of an intercom system requires running cable from the main unit to all of the stations. This may be difficult in a situation like yours where the house is already complete.

If your basement is not finished, then you can run cable across the basement. You can also run cable through your attic. The difficulty will be finding a channel (chase) between the different floors of your house.

Depending on how many rooms you want to have intercoms in, you can purchase a wireless system. In my research, I have located wireless intercom systems that have up to four stations.

The wireless systems are very easy to install and sell for under \$200. Technology in this area is changing daily. I recommend that you call a qualified intercom installation company. Numerous intercom installation and repair companies are listed in the Yellow Pages, or type "home intercoms" in your Internet search engine.

Insulation

You must be very careful when installing insulation around recessed can lights. Depending on the age of your lights, insulation installed too closely can cause them to overheat, resulting in a fire.

Since the early 1980s all recessed light fixtures approved by Underwriters Laboratories are required to have a thermal protection device in the fixture. This device will turn the lights off if they overheat. In this case insulation installed too close to the lights will cause them to go on and off as the fixtures overheat and cool.

To avoid the risk of fire or flashing lights, make sure you keep the insulation at least 3 inches away from the light fixtures. The space between the insulation and the light fixtures may result in cold drafts around the fixtures during the winter months.

To avoid this, you may want to consider installing newer fixtures with the Insulation Contact designation. These fixtures can be completely surrounded with insulation, eliminating drafts around the fixture.

Plumbing

Odors from plumbing fixtures (toilets, sinks, tubs, showers) can have several causes. In the case of your shower, it may be a dry trap. All plumbing fixtures are required to have a trap in the drain line just below the fixture.

Typically, a properly shaped trap looks like a "P" lying on its curved face. These are called P-traps. Their purpose is to hold a pool of water that stops gas odors in the drain system from entering your house.

If the trap is dry, the odors will escape from the drain system into your house. Several conditions can allow a trap to become dry: lack of use of the shower, an improperly shaped trap or an improperly installed or clogged plumbing vent.

If the trap under the shower is shaped like an "S" instead of a "P," it is improperly shaped and should be changed by a licensed plumber.

If the shower is rarely used, just running some water in it should solve the problem. Improper venting may cause the trap to be siphoned dry when the shower is used. A licensed plumber is required to diagnose and repair this condition.