HOME
REPAIR
RESOURCE
CENTER

for contracted repairs

Questions for Your
ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR

These are some areas of discussion which may help you assess the skills of an electrical contractor, or determine the scope of what you want to have done:

1. Ask about the permit.

There are very few electrical repairs that will not require a permit in most communities, so you can assume that one will be needed. If the contractor tells you one isn't required – call your city's building department and check *yourself* to verify that fact. DON'T get the permit yourself. When the contractor gets it, he/she will then be responsible to the city for doing the work to code.

2. Ask if he/she is licensed and bonded in your city.

To obtain a permit in most communities, including Cleveland Heights, an electrician must be licensed and bonded (insured) to work in that city. Ask what name and address is used on the license, and make sure it matches the contractor who will be doing the work.

3. Ask about the materials to be used.

#12 wire is the smallest gauge that should be used in a home for general circuits; #10, the smallest for 240-volt circuits. Ground Fault Circuit Interruptors (GFCIs) are the type of outlet that must be used in exterior and water-prone areas. Grounded outlets are also required in most locations when new outlets are installed. In your project involves a new service panel, find out if the panel to be installed will accept interchangeable breakers (different brands) – a real advantage if the original manufacturer ever goes out of business.

4. Ask if your electrical service should be upgraded.

If you are remodeling your kitchen – or even if you just want to add some outlets – be sure to ask whether your electrical service (the total amount of electricity coming to your house, to be divided among all your circuits) is sufficient for your needs. Tell the contractor if you are experiencing brownouts, or if your lights flicker or the TV picture gets smaller when the refrigerator cycles on. Signs like these can indicate that there is not enough power available to meet demand.

5. When upgrading electrical service, ask if it will be sufficient for future needs.

When you upgrade your electrical service, think beyond immediate usage. For example, will the new service panel you are installing have room for additional circuits if you need them at a later date? Will the electrical service have the capacity to handle new large appliances, like central air conditioning? Might you need the capacity to charge an electrical vehicle? Any electrical work should take both present and future needs into account. Ask about it.

6. Ask how the contractor plans to run new wires through your house.

Determine who is going to be responsible for repairing any walls, ceilings, or floors that have to be cut open to run the wire, and for any repainting that is needed. (Such repairing and repainting can be a big job.) *Don't assume* that the electrician will restore the surfaces to their original condition; you may need to hire someone else for that work.

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***If your house was build prior to 1978**, the walls and ceiling may have one or more coats of lead-based paint on them; if so, cutting into these surfaces can produce lead-based paint dust, which is a health hazard that poses a special threat to young children. Make sure you discuss with the contractor how much cutting will need to be done and **what protections will be taken to minimize lead contamination**.*