

# Meet **CHECK A PRO JOE!**

*Who's stepping foot in your home?*  
Tips From Our Home Service Providers



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Tips From Our Home Service Providers



[www.meetcheckaprojoe.com](http://www.meetcheckaprojoe.com)

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Designed by Amanda Cox

Manufactured in the United States of America

*This book is dedicated to all the hardworking  
Check A Pro member contractors who serve our  
community. I appreciate your dedication to excellence,  
integrity and quality work. You stand behind the  
Check A Pro brand and Check A Pro stands behind  
you. You are Check A Pro Joe!*

*- Jim Klauck, Founder*



# Acknowledgements

This book came to be as a coordinated effort amongst many people. I would like to first thank my wife, Robin, for her full support over the years. Thank you for believing in me. Robin, you are my biggest cheerleader.

Amanda Cox for her 15 years of dedication to Check A Pro. Amanda has been integral in the development of our company over the years. This book project was spearheaded by Amanda. Amanda, thank you for your dedication to Check A Pro.

A special thanks to all the Check A Pro members that contributed to this book. Without you Check A Pro would not exist. You are Check A Pro Joe!





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## REAL ESTATE

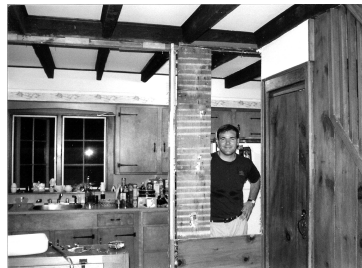
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## From The Founder

It was April 2005 when it came to me! I know enough local service providers to create a free online resource for local residents to find quality home service providers. Why would I want to bring such a service to my community? Well, I was a perfect consumer for such a service. I have owned many homes over the years, seven to be exact. Some houses were new, some were old, and one dates back to 1775. I am proud to say that I am very handy. Actually, I have remodeled many of the homes I have owned. Even though I am able to do many home projects I find it necessary to hire contractors from time to time. I have said to my friends and family that I could write a book about my experiences hiring and firing contractors.

I had once hired a contractor to strip and refinish hardwood floors throughout my house. This should have been simple. My wife, Robin and I had recently purchased the home and it was vacant. I stopped by to check on the progress one day to find the guy I hired sleeping in his car in the driveway. Not only was he sleeping on the job but I suspect he was an alcoholic as well. This did not end well for the contractor. I fired him! Now I had to quickly find a replacement for 'Rip Van Winkle' to strip down what he had started and then refinish the floors.

In 2002, I embarked on a big kitchen remodel. I was very proud of how my newly remodeled kitchen came out. The house was built in 1963 and needed much updating. My wife and I designed the new



layout and I went to work on the demolition and full remodel of the kitchen. The kitchen remodel project took about 8 weeks from start to finish all while managing a young Black Labrador Retriever and new baby boy.

As part of this remodel, I had hired a contractor through a major brand window company to install a bay window. This was a great new feature to our newly remodeled kitchen. However, the contractor was a nightmare! I came home one day to find the "window expert" in my garage using my power tools to do the job I hired him to do. I flipped out! I asked him why he didn't use his own tools. He had a less than satisfactory answer. I fired him! He put a mechanics lien on my house. Oh no here we go...!

The window contractor and I settled out of court. I learned some valuable lessons in the early years. When all of this happened, there wasn't a place to find a pre-screened contractor. The Better Business Bureau is only interested in taking money from businesses and does not adequately pre-screen its contractor members. I have found that the B.B.B. is only good for complaining about a business after the fact. I knew if our new company took the time to pre-qualify its contractor members through a vetting process our mutual customer, the homeowner would receive a valuable service.

I was so excited about my new idea to develop a list of outstanding contractors for my local community of Katy Texas. I explained the concept to my wife, we discussed it and she supported me the entire way. Well that was almost 15 years ago. Since then we have signed over 800 contractors to the Check A Pro program that was established in 2005. Our first community was Katy, and then in 2006 we expanded to Sugar Land, then Cy-Fair and The Woodlands in 2008 and then Houston wide in 2009.

We are proud to be the premier resource for Houstonian's to find pre-qualified home service providers. Here is how we do it –

1. We carefully recruit outstanding local home service providers.
2. We check the Certificate of Insurance on each member.
3. I personally meet and interview each and every business owner.
4. Our team checks licenses with the state of Texas on each member.
5. We check business and customer references.

We only allow 3 premier companies per category per market. In other words we have only 3 air conditioning repair companies in The Woodlands and 3 plumbers in Katy. The contractor pays a nominal fee to be listed on our website. In many cases we have a waiting list for the top categories. Why am I telling you this? Because I know what you are thinking, If the contractor pays Check A Pro then how is Check A Pro on the side of the homeowner? Good question. First off we have a complaint system built in. If a complaint is made by a consumer on one of our members we follow up with the homeowner and member. The contractor member receives points against them. If the member accumulates too many points they will be removed from the Check A Pro program. Yes, we have kicked out our fair share of "BAD" contractors over the years.

People who know me will tell you that I love what I do. It's true, I do thoroughly enjoy my place here on earth. I am truly a blessed man to have the opportunity to serve my

community and our customers. We actually serve two distinct customers. Our first customer is the homeowner. We are committed to helping the consumer find the right contractor for the project. Check A Pro also serves the member contractor. We take great pride in helping develop their systems, team and overall performance. You see we are not just a lead source for our members; we are here to help develop their business so they can serve the homeowner better. You could say that Check A Pro leads its members as a franchisor would support its franchisees.

People have referred to Check A Pro as another dotcom resource to find contractors. I stop them there! I tell them we are a people company. What does that mean? We treat the residents of our community as humans as we do our contractor members. Our website at [www.checkapro.com](http://www.checkapro.com) is only the vehicle for the community to access our pre-qualified members. We have been compared to the B.B.B., Angie's List and HomeAdvisor. When people ask me, "Aren't you just like Angie's List?" I respond by asking them if they have met Angie. The reality is that we were founded in Katy Texas and 15 years later we still only serve the people of the greater Houston area. We know all of our contractor members and we know what the local homeowner wants and needs.

What happens when we have an unhappy homeowner? I get involved. People can log to our website and give praise or complain about our service providers. When someone praises a member, it becomes a testimonial that is listed on the member's profile page. When a complaint is made it is delivered to my desk and I personally contact the homeowner and follow through until the issue is resolved.

This book is more about how and why I started Check A Pro. It is about how you can depend on our team of pre-qualified member contractors to get anything accomplished

around your home from air conditioning repair to window replacement. In the following chapters you will find useful information on home improvement by category. These chapters have been written by local home improvement experts, our members.

Jim Klauck  
A.K.A. Check A Pro Joe  
*Founder and President*





# **Section 1**

## **Insurance**



# **1**

## **Insurance**

### **Are You Protected?**

Insurance is a topic few want to discuss, until someone makes a mistake. Do you ask contractors and service technicians for their Certificate of Insurance? Do you know what a Certificate of Insurance is? In simple terms a C.O.I. shows you, the homeowner, what level(s) of insurance the service provider has. When requesting a Certificate of Insurance, ask to have their insurance agent or carrier email or fax it to you directly. Keep in mind that even though the service provider may have a copy with a valid date, he or she can cancel or lose coverage at any time much like your own auto policy.

At Check A Pro we work closely with our in-house insurance agency to make sure that not only are we covered properly, but that you the homeowner are also covered adequately. You see, if the contractor has ample insurance then you as a homeowner are covered through their policy first before your insurance policy comes into play.

The following chapter written by our insurance partner will be helpful to you as you assess your personal insurance needs for

your home and auto. If you are a business owner, this chapter will also be very beneficial as you protect your business assets.

# 2

## **Is Hiring a Home Service Provider that Isn't Insured Worth the Risk?**

**How Much Are You Saving? How Much Are You Risking?**

There are many factors in homeowner's decision to hire a home service provider. One of the most overlooked things is the contactor insured. Homeowners for their own protection should fully exam who they are hiring to come into their homes and work on one of your most valuable assets.

An insured company can help answer many of the other questions you should be asking:

- Why is this quote so much lower than the others?
- How long has this company been in business?
- What is the company's reputation?
- What kind of insurance should I ask for?
- What's the difference between bonded and insured?

**What does bonded mean?** A company is said to be bonded when it has purchased a surety bond. A surety bond is a promise and a guarantee that they will complete the work they agreed to do. If a company fails to meet their obligations, the customer can make a claim against the bond.

The bond company will pay the claim and collect the entire amount of the claim from the contractor which is different from insurance where the policyholder will pay the deductible and the insurance company will pay the rest of the claim.

The downside for a homeowner for a bonded contractor is the generally low limits on bonds, many are for \$10,000 to \$20,000 which may exceed your claim or if there are multiple claims the homeowner may have to share the amount with other claimants.

In addition, the bond may not be around when the actual damage or issue is discovered such as a water leak behind walls that may not be discovered for a while.

**What does Insurance cover and what should I ask for?** Any home service provider you hire should carry at least General Liability Insurance (A requirement to be a Check A Pro Home Service Provider).

General Liability protects the homeowner against damages caused by a contractor no matter why. As we all know, accidents happen (even to the best home service provider) and liability coverage will pay the damages caused by their actions.

As a homeowner you can file a claim on a contractor's liability policy and the carrier will pay you the full amount of the claim. The contractor would only have to pay the deductible and the insurance company would pay the rest.

There are many advantages for the homeowner of insurance over bonds. General Liability Insurance has much higher limits than a bond. Most policies should have a \$1,000,000 Limit so in the event of large or multiple claims most claims should receive the full amount of the claim. General Liability Insurance is easy to verify and should be a "Per Occurrence" Policy which is very important for homeowners.

With a Per Occurrence Policy a claim is paid based on when the damages "occurred" instead of when the claim is made.

A homeowner may not know of damages for years that may be happening in parts of the house unseen or not easily accessible to the homeowner. Even if the contractor isn't around anymore or doesn't even have that same insurance, it's the policy that was in effect at the occurrence of the cause of damage that would pay the claim.

A bond doesn't provide that kind of protection, so requiring a home service provider to have liability insurance, should provide better protection than a bond.

How does a homeowner find out if a company is insured? Ask for a copy of their Certificate of Insurance. Reputable contractors should provide one with their quote. If you have a hard time getting one or the contractor waffles on getting you one that should be a red flag for a homeowner.

A certificate of insurance will show all the types of coverage they have, coverage limits, policy expiration date, insurance agency and the insurance carrier that wrote the policy. It will also have a check box on it that states if it's an "Occurrence" or "Claims Made" policy. As mentioned, before it's important to make sure it's an occurrence policy. Also, make sure the policy is still in effect or not expiring while they

are doing the work. I would suggest you call or email the agency on the certificate of insurance to make sure the company has coverage. Unfortunately, some unethical contractors will alter or create fake ones, so it looks like they have insurance and hoping the homeowner won't check.

Here is a hint if you really want to make sure your protected. Ask the company to list you as an Additional Insured on the Certificate of Insurance. If you do that, the insurance company will send you a certificate of insurance with your name and address at the bottom of the certificate.

It doesn't mean you're on their policy it just means if there are any material changes to the policy (i.e. cancelled) you will be notified.

*Example Liability Claim: contractor cracking a plumbing line on your second floor causing water to run down on the inside of your walls causing water damage on the lower floors or scratching up your beautiful hardwood floors with their heavy equipment.*

General Liability will not cover every type of thing that can happen when a home service provider is working on your house.

One of the other bigger risks when people are working on your house is what happens if one of the company employees or sub-contractors gets hurt while working on your home. In most other states Workers Compensation would cover this type of situation. However, Texas is one of the few states that doesn't require a company to have Workers Compensation Insurance so many if not most home service providers don't have it. Even though it's not required, it doesn't release the company or the homeowner from the liability of an injured employee. If the company is not insured, you, the homeowner, could be open to being sued by the



injured employee or sub-contractor. Seems completely unfair but that's the way it works.

*Example: Say a roofing company is up on your two-story home adding a new roof. One of the roofers is not wearing a safety harness. He slips, falls to the ground, and breaks his pelvis. A few weeks later you get a bill in the mail for \$50,000 in hospital fees. In addition, your home insurance will likely not cover such a claim if you knowingly hired non-insured company.*

It's probably a good idea to make sure the contractor has Workers Compensation but since many if not most in Texas don't carry it, you maybe excluding a lot of them from working on your project. You must decide if it's worth the risk.

An insured home service provider doesn't guarantee that there won't be any issues. But one with insurance generally has been in business longer and hasn't has as many issues or claims because they can get insurance. One of the reasons to ask is there maybe reasons they can't get insurance, such as previous claims, new business, changing company names, etc.

Also, one of the reasons that a quote may be a lot lower than others could be that company doesn't have insurance. Obviously, insurance cost money and a reputable/insured home service provider must consider the cost of insurance when they supply you with a quote.

A homeowner could regret "saving" a little money with that low bid form that uninsured contractor.

Disclaimer: While I discussed a few things that go into hiring a home service provider, it is not exclusive of covers everything in your decision. Every situation, every dispute, every claim and coverages can be different from one policy to the next and this article doesn't

cover every situation. Anything stated in this article should not be considered legal advice. I am not an attorney.

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# **Section 2**

**Service**

**Technicians**



# 3

## Existing Plumbing

### Should It Stay? Or Should It Go?

Plumbing ... one of the most important necessities in life. It sends chills down most homeowner's spines. However, it doesn't have to be that way. Taking care of the plumbing for your home can improve the quality of your lifestyle. Few purchases are able to deliver the kind of bang for your buck as money spent plumbing your home. With thorough planning and good decisions, the plumbing process can be downright enjoyable. Planning starts by simply determining what is most important to you and your family. Determine how much you are able to spend, and then find the right plumbing company.

Remember to keep in mind your overall goals both short and long term. How long do you plan on living in your home? This will affect the effort you plan to use on taking care of your existing plumbing. If you plan on staying only a year or two then the plumbing should be aimed at necessities with an eye to potential buyers. You would want to spend your hard-earned money on items with the biggest payoff. This would include items such as replacing sewer lines, water lines and water heater(s). If you plan on staying more than a couple

years in this house, you should focus on making your home as comfortable and functional as possible. This would include items such as new faucets, toilets, tubs, showers, sinks or even adding a whole house filtration system.

If the home is older you most likely have a cast iron sewer line that over time tends to rust, flake and crack. If you have cast iron piping in your home a visual inspection will give you a good idea of the condition of your piping. Older homes also have galvanized water lines which over time can cause a small leak. In the plumbing world a small leak is a serious problem. Unfortunately, many homeowners do not feel the same way. They are under the impression that a small problem like this will take care of itself; this is not usually the case. How can such a small leak turn into such a big problem? Well, here are three ways:

- A. Over time a small leak will eat away at the floor, walls, and pretty much anything else it comes in contact with. This will not happen overnight but if the leak is not visible water will build up.
- B. Mold is a major problem, and the main culprit is moisture. A small leak can lead to mold and related issues in no time at all. Nobody wants to live in a home affected by mold.
- C. A leaking pipe can lead to poor performance. This may be the least of your concerns, but one that should tip you off that something is going on.

Once you have decided what is important to you, call a plumber and schedule a plumbing inspection. First, you will want to get online and start searching via an online plumbing directory. Call at least three companies before you make the decision on who to hire. If possible, try to ask some of the questions listed below:

- A. Is the plumber licensed?
- B. How long has the plumber been in business?
- C. Does the plumber charge an hourly rate? If so is there a discount for multiple tasks performed in the same trip? Are they offering any specials? If so ask questions that are related to the work you are interested in having performed.
- D. Does the plumber carry all insurance coverage including automobile, general liability, workman's compensation, property, liability, and umbrella coverage?
- E. Has the plumber ever been rated by an independent outside research firm?
- F. How soon can the contractor start the actual work? The best contractors stay booked up. If a contractor can start this afternoon, that may be a bad sign.

A plumber is only as good as the products he installs and the people that work for him. The best plumbers are able to hire and keep the best people. They show up on time, perform quality work in a professional manner, and guarantee their work. The best plumbers do not need to use bandit signs to do work in your home. Most bandit sign plumbers sell on price, and don't usually stay in business long; therefore, they can't warranty their work. When they get pressured, they simply change their cell numbers, and have new bandit signs made up.

No matter how good a plumber is, there will sometimes be situations or problems that come up on a major plumbing project. This is when and where your plumber makes all the difference in the world. Is the plumber upfront and straight forward with you about the situation? Does he have solutions

to the problem? The best plumbers will always have solutions and or ways to keep your project on schedule.

A meeting between the plumber and you should be held at your home. The plumber will have some questions for you. The answers you provide the plumber will allow him to guide you in the right direction. Some of the components you will need to sort through when replacing plumbing fixtures are the brand, finish (i.e. brushed nickel, chrome, or brass) and style. If you see ideas in magazines or on the internet, be sure to copy these and present them to your plumber. These may seem like small things to think about, but they will help. This will better allow you to envision the future changes to your home. For a plumbing job requiring permits and inspections, it may require more time to complete the project. If a plumbing repair is done in your home, it is almost always necessary to pull and permit with the jurisdiction.

**Water heaters:** Most plumbers offer different quality brands. Some manufacturers offer different lines of products providing options for varying budgets. The different options will allow the buyer to extend the manufacturer's warranty. Your contractor should be able to explain the differences between available product lines. Tankless heaters are very economical and will provide you with an endless supply of hot water. Tankless heaters will cost more to install but they last twice as long as a tank heater. A basic heater is going to be a gas tank heater or electric heater. Spend some time checking out the manufacturers' website online. The best water heater manufacturers have been in business for decades. Buying a new water heater is a lot like buying a new car. There will be costs upfront and there will be required maintenance to keep your heater running effectively and efficiently.

**Toilets and faucets:** Although a toilet may seem basic, manufacturers have created several different styles and colors. Its functionality is extremely important, but comfort is important as well. New and better designs have resulted in a



comfort level that was never encountered before. Two-piece toilets are often the most popular and least expensive option. Most manufacturers also offer one-piece toilets at a higher cost. Toilet maintenance is important as well in order to maintain its functionality. Choosing a faucet is dependent upon the finish and the style. Among some are brushed nickel, brass, and chrome finish.

**Water lines:** Water lines are basic; they supply you with hot and cold water inside and outside your home. Everyone needs running water. You will either have copper, galvanized PVC, CPVC or pex pipes in your home depending on the year it was built and if any upgrades have been made.

**Whole House Water Filter:** A whole house filter connects to the main water line entering your house so that all of the water dispensers in your house – faucets, toilets, showers, baths, kitchen, laundry – dispense treated water. Typically, the whole house water filter is connected to the main water line before it splits into the hot water heater. Determining what type of whole house water filter, you need depends on the type of contaminants in your water and what needs to be removed. The contaminants in your water depend on the type of water system your home is connected to. Talk to your plumber about the common types of contaminants such as sediment, chemicals, chlorine, and iron. Installing a whole house filter for your home will mean a longer life for your appliances and plumbing fixtures.

Please consider Nick's Plumbing & Sewer Services as your contractor for all your plumbing and remodeling needs. We have been serving the greater Houston area since 1979. Our office is conveniently located in the Houston Heights and we operate 27 hours a day, 7 days a week for emergency plumbing needs. Plumbing breaks when you least expect it. We know how important it is to have a reliable company you can depend on.

Our number one goal is to be straightforward and honest with all of our clients at all times. Let us prove to you why "We're on our way". We can and will provide you a certificate of insurance, which list all of our coverage and limits. We have been endorsed by Dave Ramsey, are Check A Pro approved, and recommended by Angie's List.

Our best advertisement is a happy and satisfied customer. We get a huge percentage of our work from former customers who tell their friends and family about us. When you call us, we will treat you like family. No high-pressure sales pitch, just a desire to help you. Call or visit our website, let us show you how we can take care of your plumbing needs.

**NICK'S PLUMBING & SEWER SERVICES, INC.**

Richard Saad, *Owner*  
(713) 766-1438

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## Tips For Do-It-Yourself Toilet Repairs

By: Nick's Plumbing & Sewer Service, Inc.

1. **Turn off the toilet tank at the toilet stop of closest stop which is by the base.** Keep turning the handle clockwise until it shuts off.
2. **Drain the tank by pushing the handle down and holding it until the water goes all the way down.** Hold the handle until no more water goes down the hole. There will still be about 1 inch of water in the tank. Wipe all the water out using a sponge.
3. **Use a small adjustable wrench to disconnect the toilet stop nut.** Disconnect the tank from the bowl by removing the bolts found inside the bottom of the tank. Using a large screwdriver to support the head on the bolt, then turn the nut under the tank with an adjustable wrench until it is possible to remove the entire bolt from the tank. Repeat the process on all the bolts. Disassemble and remove all parts inside the tank.
4. **Carefully align the valve assembly.** Gently push through the hole, then turn the locking ring hand tight to make a good seal. Use large pliers to fully tighten the seal. Guide the assembly through the hole, then put the tank seal into place that's located on the ballcock and hand tighten the locking nut. Use a small pair of slip-joint pliers to get a more secure fit.
5. **There are 21 pieces to install three tank-to-bowl nuts.** Start off with the bolt then slide on a seal. Repeat this process for the other bolts. Use the same process as before; squeeze all the rubber seals onto the bolts. Once all the inside and outside seals are in

place, slide the brass washers on and lock them into place with thinner nuts. Hand tighten; use an adjustable wrench to secure. Start with the flexible supply line. It has a heavy-duty seal that should be hand tightened, then use slip-joint pliers a quarter turn. Slide the handle through the hole and then tighten the bolt. Don't forget to take the overflow tube and place it back into the hole. The overflow tube is what fills up the bowl during the flushing cycle.

6. **Position the tank on top of the bowl.** Tighten all of the bolts using small slip-joint pliers and make sure the tank doesn't wobble. Hold the handle all the way down while the water is filling into the bowl. This will reveal if there are any leaks before the bowl is full of water. If the seal looks good, let off the handle to allow the bowl to fill up completely. Adjust the water level so it's 1/2 inch below the fill tube.

# 4

## At Home With Natural Stone

### It's Natures Way

#### To repair or restore?

How do you know whether your natural stone needs to be repaired or restored? How do you know which one it needs? When thinking about your stone, think about the following two options:

1. **Repair:** Repair is the act of making a part of stone that may be broken or chipped look *as good as new*.
2. **Restore:** Restoration is the act of making a stone look as if it was just put in brand new.

**Let's talk Marble.** Lots and lots of new homes have marble or other natural stones in them. Marble is a very popular choice in kitchens and many bathrooms but is it right for you. It is a calcium-based stone so it is soft and can scratch or etch fairly easy but can be restored fairly easy also. Also being calcium based it can also stain so make sure you have it sealed with a good name brand sealer. More about

sealers later. If it's in a kitchen a good cleaning regimen is very helpful with good cleaning products for natural stone not a general cleaning product. If you have problems don't worry, they can be fixed.

Take it for Granite or not, Granite is a great natural stone for kitchens. It is an igneous stone made from lava that is compressed over millions of years deep in the earth. It's hard and fairly stain resistant but I do recommend it be sealed with a good sealer. It won't scratch as easily but can be scratched or chipped with a very hard hit or a harder stone or certain metals. Mostly they occur around the sink or on straight edges but can be fixed very easily. Cleaning around the faucets is necessary mainly because water may contain calcium and leaves that white stuff around it but it's easy to clean and polish back to a shine. A high polish on granite is best in a kitchen due to ease of cleaning but with good sealing it will stay cleaner longer.

Another very popular stone is travertine, it's a softer stone that is used for mostly on floors, but a lot of builders use it in showers and bath countertops. It can etch fairly easy but can be restored easily with the right care products. It can be polished or honed and again with the right care products it will stay beautiful for years.

**Let's clean it up!** When cleaning any natural stone please consult with a professional that knows stone care products and can guide you thru the cleaning process or have it cleaned and sealed by a professional restoration specialist. A general cleaner will clean but possibly can remove any sealers on your stone. A stone care product from a stone company works to protect your sealers and will help them last longer. We recommend sealing marble every year and granite about every 2 to 3 years as well as a good cleaning and care program from the time a job is completed. Some sealers give a longer warranty, but it will depend on the cleaning program we

set up with you. Etching is a rough or scabby looking spot on any stone mainly on softer stones but can be repaired fairly easily by the right technicians.

Whether it's marble, granite, travertine, slate or any other natural stone with proper care and restoration if needed will last a lifetime, remember they are already old. The main types of finishing on stones are polishing, honing and a matte type of finish and each have very similar cleaning processes. Stones are a beautiful way of showing how nature creates and showcases itself.

Let's talk about sealers. There are different types of sealer such as water based, petroleum based, alcohol based and other types of carriers for the sealing materials that are in them. There are impregnating, which soak in and leave the sealer inside the stone to protect from within, and topical sealers, which are thicker and stay on the top of a surface and protect on top by not letting anything soak in. I do not recommend topical sealers on any natural stone except for slate and I will discuss it with the customer first to determine the best products to use. Keep in mind that sealers only slow down staining or etching they can't prevent it, especially on soft stones that have open pores.

A restoration specialist is trained to repair and restore any type of natural stone or tile as well as most man-made countertop products. Your counters were installed by a fabrication shop and not all have the knowledge of full restoration so please ask questions if you feel you need restoration.

The main thing to remember about natural stone is, if you think it needs restoration, call a real restoration specialist. They care about your stone and how it looks. Info on the internet is not always up to date. Or, it may be one person's

way of doing things and not a true way of restoration by experts.

**JEWEL STONE SERVICES**

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Servicing the Greater Houston Area



## Natural Stone Tips

By: Jewel Services

1. **Know the basics of the job you are hiring for.** Being able to question the person you are wanting to hire about simple job details will tell you whether they know what they are doing. For example, if a contractor can't tell you the basic materials he will use, there is probably a reason.
2. **Get it in writing.** Unless you get it in writing, it means nothing. If a problem arises down the road, you will want proof of what you agreed on.
3. **Ask for references.** Ask for references and call them. It is important to know who you are dealing with and if a problem will be rectified when it occurs.
4. **Trust your gut.** If you get a funny feeling about the person you are talking to, listen to it. You may regret not listening later.
5. **Do NOT pay upfront.** You should never pay for the entire job in full before the job is completed. Some companies will allow you to put no money down or make a partial payment to start the job. If a contractor wants his full payment in advance, he may not be planning on showing back up for work.



# 5

## The Moving Wall

### A.K.A. Your Garage Door

I'm old enough to remember a time when the garage door was not a convenient entrance and exit to our homes. Once we arrived home and parked the car in the driveway, we actually got out of the car and walked the "long path" pathway to the front door.

Today, for most of America, the garage door has become the "front door" to our homes. I've actually showed up at home where the front porch had been turned into an atrium with no clear pathway to the front door. I had to use a stick to reach the door bell and was then told by the homeowner to meet back at the garage door for enter - yes, we love the convenience of pushing a button and entering and exiting through that magical moving wall...

Why do I call the garage door a "moving wall"? The answer is this – the average two car garage door can weigh between 140-200 lbs. But if your door is made out of wood, your door can weigh 3-4 times that amount! So just imagine taking the wall in your living room which supports your big

screen TV and moving it around your house each time you want watch the game; you'd be very aware of how heavy it is and how much energy needs to be expended in order for you to relocate that wall each time you want to change your view.

Now you may be saying – "There's no way that door weighs more than my living room wall, it lifts so easily!" Don't let the ease of daily operation fool you. Your garage door is balanced by springs and when those springs work correctly, the door appears to weigh next to nothing – but when that spring breaks (all springs will), you'll quickly realize just how heavy your garage door is and your car will be trapped inside until the door is repaired. I need to inject a quick note here: many assume that the electric garage door opener is what lifts the garage door. This is not accurate. While the opener is technically opening and closing your garage door, it's not really doing any labor. A garage door opener isn't designed to lift or push a garage door, it is only supposed to guide a well-balanced door up and down. If your spring/springs aren't functioning properly, your opener is in jeopardy of destruction.

This brings me to next point. Garage door repair can be very dangerous, even for the expert. Don't be fooled by "YouTube university" into believing you can easily repair the door yourself! More often than not, some of the steps and/or safety practices have been left out of the video. More than 20,000 garage door related injuries are reported to the ER every year in the United States. Please don't attempt to repair or install your garage door yourself, let the professional help!

I must say this again – the garage door is under **EXTREME** tension and can cause **SERIOUS** damage and/or injury to anything or anyone in its path. Take no risks. Call a qualified garage door specialist to repair or replace your garage door.

**YOUR GARAGE DOOR SHOULD HAVE A SAFETY INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE PERFORMED ON A YEARLY BASIS.**

Your garage door has many moving parts and should be inspected and lubricated regularly to prevent catastrophic failure. If problems arise, do not postpone calling a professional, this can save you money and help avoid a trip to the hospital!

**EZ LIFT GARAGE DOORS AND MORE**

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Servicing the Greater Houston Area

## 23 Point Garage Door Safety Inspection

By: EZ Lift Garage Doors and More

The following list is what a good, qualified garage door technician should look for when performing your yearly garage door safety inspection. Yes, yearly. Most don't even know that a garage door should require any maintenance let alone a safety inspection but remember the "moving wall" discussion... That 140-800 pound wall, needs to be maintained in order to keep you safe!

1. **Spring & Door Balance:** We visually and physically inspect the springs for signs of rust and deterioration and proper tension, ensuring the spring(s) are fully functional.
2. **Rollers:** Rollers are inspected for signs of wear and tear, or damage.
3. **Cables:** Cables are inspected for fraying and kinking, which leads to door failure.
4. **Drums:** Drums are looked over for unusual defects, wear and cracking.
5. **Center Bearing:** Inspection for wear and tear or burned out bearings.
6. **Center Bracket:** Center brackets are inspected for signs of bending and other anomalies.
7. **Torsion Tube:** We inspect for rust and bending. The spring tube holds the springs and turns as the door opens and closes.

8. **End Bearing Plates:** The bearing plates are located at each end of the torsion tube mounted outside the drums. The bearings allow the torsion tube to turn freely as the door opens and closes.
9. **Hinges:** Hinges are inspected for damage and excessive wear.
10. **Top Fixtures:** Top fixtures hold the top roller in place.
11. **Bottom Brackets:** Bottom brackets are mounted at the bottom of the door and they hold the bottom rollers in place. These brackets contribute to the lifting point on the garage door. We inspect for wear, damage and breakage.
12. **Vertical Tracks:** Bending and damage can occur.
13. **Horizontal Track:** Bending and damage can occur.
14. **Jamb Brackets:** Jamb brackets attach the vertical tracks to the framework on each side of the garage door opening, our inspection searches for position, bending and other damage.
15. **Strut:** Struts are added supports for the garage door structure. Generally, garage doors have a strut mounted at the top of the door. Some garage doors are equipped with multiple struts depending on the weight of the door. Struts may be added if damage requires additional struts for support.
16. **Weather Seal:** Weather seals (the rubber strip located at the bottom of the garage door). This seal helps prevent wind and windblown objects from entering the garage. We inspect for dry rot and rodent damage.

17. **Sections (interior/exterior):** We check for any dents, tearing in the metal along with any other damage.
18. **Opener Controls:** Controls are inspected for functioning efficiency.
19. **Opener Trolley/Carriage:** Inspected for damage and/or wear & tear.
20. **Safety Sensors:** The safety sensors keep the door from closing if a person or object is in the garage doors path.
21. **Motor Gears, Chain and Belt:** Motor gears are susceptible to wear. Chains and belts inspected for proper tension and signs of deterioration.
22. **Open/Close Limits:** We test the limits to ensure the door opens and closes to the proper travel locations.
23. **Opening/Closing Force:** We test the force limits to ensure there is proper force being applied to the door during operation.



# 6

## Gas Product Services

### Enhancing Your Indoor and Outdoor Living Spaces with Gas Powered Features

People often ask me how I got into this business. After all, this is a very narrow niche that I have carved out for myself. I always tell the story of a young guy that wanted to make a living but didn't have time for college. In 1990 I was working in an auto parts store. I was at work every night and on the weekends. I needed that paycheck, but I had my eyes and ears open for greater opportunities. A co-worker of mine had a friend that owned a gas grill store in the Spring Branch area of Houston. He said they were hiring installers, so I applied for the job. Well as fate would have it, I got hired.

One of the best ways to learn a business, or anything for that matter, is to help someone that already knows it. So, for the next 8 years I hung-out, helped and listened to a man that had 50 years of experience. I learned the ins and outs of the recreational gas products business. In 1998, I became an independent contractor, providing installation and field service work for a few grill stores around the Houston area.

After a while I realized it was better to sell the products you are installing. In 2002 I started Gas Product Services. Together with my son Brian and 1 or 2 other employees, we at Gas Product Services offer sales, service and installation of gas grills, gas lights, gas logs and a variety of outdoor fire features, like fire pits, fire bowls, luau torches and tiki torches. We also build outdoor kitchens through partnership with other Check A Pro member companies.

## **GAS GRILLS**

Gas grills are a great way to enjoy the pleasures of outdoor cooking without the mess and hassle of charcoal or firewood. We at Gas Product Services offer gas grills that are mounted to a post, set in the ground and connected to the gas meter. Post mounted grills are an excellent choice for the person that doesn't want to worry about running out of propane or has limited patio space. Also, we have grills on carts. These cart grills are portable and can be rolled around the patio or in, and out of the garage. It is a common misconception that a cart grill must have a propane tank. In many cases, we can install a riser post on the edge of the patio. This riser post can be connected to the gas meter and when activated, will supply natural gas to fuel the cart grill. In this scenario, the grill has a flexible hose that plugs into a fitting on the riser. This works much like an air hose, with quick disconnect technology. Weather on propane or natural gas, cart model grills are a great option for folks with limited space, or anyone who is not quite sure about what their long-term plans are. Some cart models can be removed from the cart and built in.

Like anything else, gas grills need to be serviced at least once a year. The gas passages can become clogged and result in poor performance. I have seen ants crawl into a gas orifice and cause the corresponding burner to be starved for gas. The result will be a grill that doesn't heat up like it should.

Spider webs can accumulate in the venturi tubes resulting in a flashback (flames shooting out). Not only can this cause cosmetic damage to the grill, but it can cause failure of seals and lead to gas leaks. We offer a grill service which is a thorough inspection and correction of these issues. So, whether you need to replace or repair an existing grill, or you want something new, give us a call for all your gas grill needs.

## **OUTDOOR KITCHENS**

Outdoor kitchens are the hottest thing in the leisure products industry. At Gas Product Services we offer a wide selection of built-in grill of all sizes and price ranges. The grill itself is just the beginning of the outdoor kitchen plan. At Gas Product Services provide a whole range of outdoor kitchen products, including grills, doors, drawers, refrigerators, under counter ice makers, side burners, power burners, sinks and faucets. We even have a grill that is half gas and half charcoal. We can partner with other Check A Pro members to get the whole thing built out, or we can deliver the products, install, setup and educate the homeowner on how to operate.

## **GAS LIGHTS**

Gas lights are a great way to add elegance and ambiance to the home. Wall mounted open flame gas lights are the a very popular addition to high end homes and other structures. Usually wall mounted gas lights are installed to either side of the entryway. We have also installed gas lights hanging from the ceiling or on the top of a wall or column. Open flame gas lights are susceptible to blowing out in the wind. We can install automated gas lights that allow the homeowner to turn on and off at will. Even with an app on the phone. Also, this automation will cause the light to re-ignite if the wind blows it out. For this reason, we highly recommend automation on lights mounted up high, out of reach. Because

otherwise, someone must drag out the extension ladder to re-light and that can be dangerous.

Gas lights can also be mounted on a post out in the yard. Post mounted lights can be open flame like a candle, or with glowing mantles like a camping lantern. This is a great way to illuminate a dark corner or a commonly traveled pathway. Gas lights stay on when the power goes out. Gas lights need to be serviced annually or sooner if problems arise. These fixtures have tiny passageways that clog up and disrupt gas flow causing the flame to diminish or go out completely.

## **GAS LOGS & FIREPLACES**

Gas Logs are a great way to get the warmth and atmosphere of a wood burning fireplace without the mess of firewood and ashes. At Gas Product Services we offer many styles of traditional gas logs for vented or unvented fireplaces. We also offer the more contemporary burners with sparkling glass in many shapes and colors. All these products can be automated using remote control, wall switches or, with the right home automation system, these products can be controlled with a smart phone.

Many builders in recent years are installing direct vent of "B"-vent fireplaces in homes. These fireplaces are usually behind glass and are controlled by remote or wall switch. These products need to be serviced or repaired periodically. We offer that service as well. We have the parts and know how to get that fireplace working like it should.

## **OUTDOOR FIRE FEATURES**

We love outdoor fire features. Tiki torches, Luau torches, firepits round or square, fire bowls and linear burners. We have it all. We also know how to make it work. We can install torches around the pool to give the look of a Hawaiian

beach party. We can add automation that can be controlled by the pool remote system. We can build custom burners to fit oddly shaped fire pits. If you have a firepit that doesn't work give us a call. We offer services and repair of existing fire features.

Weather it's a gas grill, a gas light, gas logs, direct vent fireplaces, outdoor kitchens or outdoor fire features. Weather you need it fixed or you want to replace existing products, or you want to install something new, call Gas Product Services for all your recreational gas product needs.

### **GAS PRODUCT SERVICES**

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Servicing the Greater Houston Area

## Helpful Gas Tips

By: Gas Product Services

1. If you smell gas, turn it off, and call our office.
2. If the remote doesn't work, change the batteries.
3. There are more batteries under or next to the fireplace.
4. Be sure to clear out the venturi tubes on the grill burners.
5. Keep your grill clean and dry.
6. Don't get your gas logs wet.
7. Always open the chimney when burning vented logs.
8. When replacing mantles, put back all but 1 glass pane before lighting new mantles.

# 7

## Home Entertainment

### Home Theater And Beyond

It used to be so simple. You just went down to Montgomery Ward's and looked at the 3 different models of TVs and bought the one that fit the spot in the living room. There were almost no changes to TVs from the late 50s to the early 90s, and then everything changed. This is great if you like to enjoy pictures that are almost as good as being there. It is also good if you like to save money because in the 60s a color TV was about 3 months of an average working man's paycheck, but today it's only about a week's worth of pay. But while today's electronics are a real bargain, choosing the right one for you is more difficult. In the old days you would buy a TV and expect it to last for 25 years, but today obsolescence occurs in only 5 years. So, while the TV may last longer than that, it will not do everything you may want it to do in a very short period of time. That is why you may not want to buy a sophisticated piece of electronics from one of the big warehouse type stores because they often have merchandise that is already a couple of years old but is still unsold. These places often buy distressed merchandise from other companies that have gone

out of business in order to give you those low prices. So, you might be better off dealing with a specialist or boutique retailer if you really want to get the most value. Remember that the lowest dollar amount may not be the best value.

Nothing gives you as much return on Investment as a good home entertainment system. You can buy a lot of things with your hard-earned dollars, like a boat or a motorcycle, or even a vacation to some exotic spot. But the boat gets used once or twice a year by most people, yet the monthly expense of maintenance goes on. Calculate what that costs you per minute of enjoyment! A motorcycle looks great in the driveway. You get to wax it up, and change the oil, and here in Texas you get a lot of good riding days. But even if you have the time to take advantage of it, it takes away from other things like "Family Time", unless you buy bikes for the whole family. A great vacation is usually, but not always, fun. There are no guarantees. And not only is it expensive to buy, but you lose income producing time while you are gone.

### **Enter the Home Theater!**

Return on investment is what we love. You will use this every day of the week. When it's too hot to be outside a cool home theater is the place to relax and watch a great game. When it's too cold to be outside, you can watch a good football or basketball game. Then plan the major event a few times per month for "Family Movie Night"! Let each member of the family choose a movie in a rotation and then pop the corn and make some magic and memories. It is like taking a mini vacation! And unless you have to buy the movie on Blu-ray, it cost you nothing but the popcorn price. Try that for return on investment.

### **Don't forget the music!**



We always recommend that you add music to the entertainment options with an AppleTV box. This is not a TV at all but rather a streaming device. It will pull your entire music collection from your iTunes library on your computer so you can browse your collection from Big Screen TV or even from your handheld remote or iPhone while enjoying a cool beverage on the back patio or even in the pool with our water proof remotes. These devices sell for about \$100.00 talk about return on investment! Every member of the family gets to enjoy it, and even if the paycheck is a little short, there are always free movie downloads on DirecTV, Netflix, Hulu, Crackle and others.

### **If you have to press more than two buttons it is too hard.**

We have always maintained this as a universal truth. So, we will design, and program, a universal remote control to make it both easy and fun. In fact, we can even use your iPad or iPhone if you like. Why choose...have both! At AV Expert we sell fun and offer choices.

### **How is your theater doing?**

Put on your favorite action movie and close your eyes. Can you "see" the action based only on the audio? You should be able to. Good examples are using the movie "Speed" at 7 minutes when the car tops the hill and jumps over you. How about the first battle scene in Iron Man I? You should hear bullets flying everywhere.

Or try "Gladiator", the battle scene in the forest. You should hear the arrows flying past you. In the comedy movie "Killers", you should clearly hear the airplane engines "around" you and have good clear dialog.

Now about the picture: Are things that should be "black" as black as the bezel of the TV or a piece of black velvet? Or are they more "gray"? Black should be black. Now look at something that is white. Is it white? Does a shiny forehead often look like it has a white patch on it? Especially if it is outside in bright light? These are problems. All TVs are shipped from the factory in "Torch Mode". That means everything is cranked up as much as it can go. This is so it can "out-punch" the TVs in the showroom. But they can look a little or a lot garish in your living room. Also, they use way more energy than they should and create more heat load than is desirable, and all of these things shorten the life of your TV.

You need a good Imaging Science Foundation trained calibrator who has the training and the expensive gear to calibrate your TV and make it look better, last longer and use less energy. This service usually cost about \$150.00 and takes about an hour. It is money well invested.

Here at AV Expert Our best advertisement is a happy and satisfied customer. We get a huge percentage of our work from former customers who tell their friends and family about us. Call Doc today to arrange an in-home appointment to discuss your project.

Whether it's a home theater, media room, whole house audio, summer kitchen, patio or swimming pool we have the options to meet your desires and your budget.

## **AUDIO AND VIDEO GURU**

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Servicing the Greater Houston Area

## Selecting A Good Electronic Systems Contractor

By: Audio and Video Guru

1. **Ask what certifications they hold.** At the bare minimum he or she should have a CEDIA EST1 or installer I certification. CEDIA [www.cedia.org](http://www.cedia.org) is the Custom Electronics Design and Installation Association. It is a worldwide body of experts set up 25 years ago to make sure that we offer you the consumer the best possible performance on your system. These certified people have answered 200 important questions about the type of work they do and gotten at least 70% of them right in a timed test by an independent testing authority. If they are going to be installing your TV they should be ISF certified, or their supervisor who holds that certification should come out to do the calibration.

If you spent any amount of money, we want to make sure you get all the performance that you paid for. This stuff is difficult. The class to set up a mid priced Denon Audio Video Receiver is 8 hours of classroom time preceded by 4 hours of on-line classes. This is not something you can do yourself if you want it to perform.

2. **Ask if they are Check A Pro members.** Check-A-Pro Joe makes sure that his member contractors are what they say they are.
3. **Do they have a website with good testimonials?** Does the owner put his name on it? If not, you may want to deal with someone less anonymous. Do a Google search for of the owners name. See what you find out. If he has any bad comments, you should ask

him about them. If you don't like the answer you get then move on.

4. **Do they have insurance?** That is important. Legitimate companies have insurance.
5. **Does he sell brand name merchandise from reputable companies?** Once again, there are many brands out there, some of which are good even though they are new. However, many companies go out of business each year and if they do, you may not have a warranty. How will your contractor handle that situation?
6. **How's the pricing?** A company that sells too cheaply will not be there when you need them, and in fact may not even be able to complete the work. Beware the low-price dealers. Many have come and they are all gone.
7. **How long have they been in business?** A new company may be very good, or at least have good intentions but will they be there when you need them five years from now? My experience over the past 30 years is, maybe not.
8. **Are all of their technicians certified?** Do they speak your language? Can you have an easy conversation about the relative color of red? If not, move on. You will need these people for years in the future. Make it easy on yourself.
9. **Do they offer service when you need it?** Nights, weekend and holidays are when you really want your stuff to work. Anything with electronics in it, will fail from time to time. You need to have someone that can be contacted at those times, so do you get an

emergency contact? More important can you contact the owner directly if you have a major problem. If the owner has too many layers of people below him, you may not get a good result.

10. **How soon can they start the work?** If he can start today, that could be a bad sign. Most contractors are booked up at least a week in advance, and some longer than that.



# **Section 4**

## **Outdoor Oasis**





# 8

## Your Backyard Oasis Customizing Your Backyard

When you open the back door to your home and look into your backyard, what do you see? Most of the time you see an open canvas that you could fill with your ideas such as, a fire pit for roasting marshmallows, or a pergola to keep cool in the summer. Whatever your vision may be, there are some things to consider when hiring a contractor. Always do your research. In the age of technology, we live in today, you can find a company's information immediately. Whether it is through the Better Business Bureau or just a blog someone may have written; you will be able to get a good feeling of a contractor within seconds on the internet. Also, you will want to get references. A good company has many references and will be willing to give you as many as you can handle. And don't be afraid to call the references you are given. Customers are usually more than willing to share a positive or negative experience they have had. A good rule of thumb when hiring anyone to do work at your home is to trust your instincts. If something sounds too good or you feel uneasy about someone, your first instinct is usually the correct one.

All Things Outdoors is a one stop shop for a person's outdoor living needs; whether they need concrete work, a concrete coating to spruce up a boring slab, a pergola for shade and protection from the sun, a patio cover to safeguard against the elements, or landscaping to make their yard stand out from everyone else's. We are a turnkey company that can meet their every need. Our clientele consists of commercial and residential folks who are looking to make their property extraordinary. We can work within any budget to create a custom look. We take great pride in our work and attempt to treat every home or business like it is our own.

From most of our customers who choose to work with us we always hear the same things, that we were selected because the work will be performed by one company and the customer deals directly with the owner, not a sales representative. For example, if a customer needs a concrete slab, concrete coating and a patio cover, All Things Outdoors can do all those projects as opposed to the customer having a concrete company, concrete coating company, framer, electrician, roofer, etc. We do all the coordinating giving the customer peace of mind. This is important in having project control. Most companies would have to use subcontractors or farm out the work to complete a project. Subcontractors can make a job feel messy and you can lose control of a project very quickly.

We are family owned and operated and we always know that when a lead comes in, the customer will be getting an honest and fair quote. Communication is key to our success, and we do not sell our customers on what we say alone. We sell ourselves based on our quality of work and our abundant communication directly with our customers. We update our customers as frequently as possible with schedule updates and are always available to speak to, if a question presents itself. We also stay in constant contact with our crews

to make sure everything that we have told the customer is still on track.

All Things Outdoors is a proud member of several community organizations that help ensure our integrity and our quality of work. Always check organizations a contractor belongs to before hiring them. If they are members of reputable organizations, they are more likely to stay true their word and provide fair prices and good quality of work. The Better Business Bureau and the Check A Pro group are two that we really hang our hats on. We not only pride ourselves on honesty and quality, we have the proof to back it up.

Any consumer in today's world knows the importance of doing research before hiring any contractor. There are unfortunately too many fly by night companies that are out to make a quick dollar. We believe educating the customer is the best way to ensure they are getting a true professional. We have been the Winner of Distinction through the BBB's Awards for Excellence program and have also received the Platinum Hardhat Award from Check A Pro. No, we do not sell every customer we encounter, but we leave them with the knowledge they need to ensure they hire a trustworthy contractor. And that's the important thing.

As a contractor our best source of advertising is word of mouth referrals. It outweighs every other source of getting business by far. Whenever you have earned the trust and respect of an individual, you have set yourself apart from anyone else in the industry. You also have a direct connection to everyone they know, co-workers, family and friends. The times that we get a call from someone who is a referral lets us know we are doing our jobs the right way.

We have learned the best way to earn future referrals from someone is not only based on how they were satisfied when we finished the job, but how we tended to them after the

job. Warranty work is more important than a new customer. Whenever an issue presents itself, the way we handle it is what sets us apart from our competitors. We know that we are dealing with a satisfied customer and they immediately become a priority. We listen to the issue, determine what needs to be corrected, provide a date in which it will be corrected, and show up on time. People always tell us that the way we handle the after-sale part of our business is what makes them tell others about us.

At All Things Outdoors we like to stay involved with our community and local charities. One of the things we had the honor of taking part in was building a cedar arbor for ABC's Extreme Makeover Home Edition (Sundays 8/7c on ABC), when the show was here in Houston. Another charitable project we were involved in was for a nurse at the North Cypress Medical Center. She was one of the hardest working people we had ever met. She had called our company to build a patio cover at her home for her and her dogs, which she referred to as "her kids". She chose our company and we built the patio cover for her. At the time of completion, we let her know that because of her wonderful service to others in the community and large heart, we would like to show our appreciation by not charging her for the new addition. She was touched that we recognized her hard work and the differences she made in people's lives when most people just overlooked it as her everyday job.

Here at All Things Outdoors we strive to be the best at work we do and work every day to improve our abilities. The two things we focus on the most are customer satisfaction and our quality of work, which has brought us success and growth even during the economic downturn. We work to turn every home into a place of rest and relaxation, where the customer can wind down after a hard day of work and give them a place to entertain family and friends. We believe in more than just being a business and providing a service, we create a personal

oasis for homeowners across our area. Let us "customize your Texas backyard".

**ALL THINGS OUTDOORS**

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Servicing the Greater Houston Area

## Tips for Maintaining Concrete Coatings

By: All Things Outdoors

1. **Cleaning** - Use a high-pressure nozzle on a semi-regular basis to prevent dirt and stains from becoming embedded into your texture or masonry finish.
2. **Mildew and Algae** - If mildew or algae occur, mix 50% pool chlorine to water. Apply directly onto the affected area and then lightly scrub in the solution. Let it soak in, but do NOT let it dry. Rinse with water and use a broom to remove any excess water.
3. **Re-sealing** - Most concrete sealers typically last between five and seven years. This depends on weather patterns and amount of traffic on the area. When it is time to re-seal, be sure to select a lasting concrete sealer, and add in slip resistant to keep you concrete safe. Keeping up with this will preserve your patio and keep it looking new!
4. **Enjoy** - Concrete coatings require little maintenance which provides a stress-free place to escape the busy world, where you can just relax!

# 9

## **Sprinkler System Installation**

### **Is Your System Good Enough?**

A sprinkler system may be viewed in two very different ways: from the homeowner's perspective and the other from the installer. The former has a simpler more pragmatic view – if the plants and lawn are being watered, that's probably good enough. The contractor has a more technical view – not only does all plant material need to be watered, it must be watered uniformly and efficiently in a manner that promotes conservation. This junkyard of pipes, fittings, valves, wires, sprinklers, and a controller, must all be masterfully assembled into the perfect watering system. Or is it?

Think about this – 99% of the entire system is buried, you never see it. Most homeowners never see their system operate on a regular basis. The cycle is completed before most people have arisen. So how is one to know if the quality of the system they're considering will be excellent, good, or garbage? Or even more importantly, why should you care?

Reasons you might want to care:

- A poor design or inferior installation can cause you to use 50% – 75% more water than needed to keep plants and lawn healthy. Over the life of the system this will easily exceed \$10,000!
- Too much or too little water is a major cause of plant failure. Even if plants don't die outright, disease and insects can invade, all started by improper watering. Plant replacement and insect and disease control are expensive.
- Water is a precious resource and we've been blessed abundantly in southeast Texas. We should be thankful and good stewards, using it wisely.
- Major revisions to existing sprinkler systems are costly. It's much cheaper to do it right the first time.

As mentioned earlier, most homeowners will not see their systems operate regularly, and even if they did, they probably would not be qualified to determine the effectiveness or quality of the design simply by watching it operate. Many people think if an area is getting wet, the system is doing its job. Nothing could be further from the truth. The two biggest culprits: poor distribution uniformity and excessive pressure.

So, if you would have trouble evaluating a system *after* it's installed, how could you be expected to properly evaluate the three or more proposals in front of you, *before* it's installed? Here are some tips:

- Discuss sprinkler spacing with the representative. There should be "head-to-head" placement of sprinklers. This means all sprinklers within a zone (area of coverage) should be spraying to the next sprinkler on the row *and* that sprinklers in one row spray to those in the next row.



- Planting beds often should be sprayed from two sides – from the back and from the front. Shrubs often interfere with the spray pattern.
- Discuss accommodations for plant growth. This is especially significant if your plants are young. Ask what revisions will be needed in several years.
- Sprinkler height is important especially in beds with annual color. A four-inch popup might function well if those snapdragons are new; but in several weeks you may be watering just the front row. A twelve-inch sprinkler, although more expensive, would have been the proper choice.
- Areas should be zoned properly. The primary considerations are separate lawn and beds, grouping plant material together with similar water requirements, sun / shade areas, slope and areas with microclimates.
- Discuss pressure, especially excessive pressure. Learn how the contractor will determine if it exists and what would be done to eliminate it.
- Driveways, walks, fences and walls should not be over sprayed; in fact, doing so violates TCEQ regulations.

Suppose you've done your homework and asked the right questions. What other factors should you consider?

**Warranty:** It takes a trained expert to evaluate a sprinkler system for effectiveness and water distribution uniformity. The trained eye can determine which areas are being over or under watered. This can be done even if the plant material appears healthy. You might wonder how a lawn could look good while the sprinkler system is poor. The answer is simple – rain. Our

55 inches per year masks over the design problems. Rest assured the deficiencies are still there and water is still being wasted; it's just not apparent to the untrained eye. However, if we go six weeks during the summer without rain, then problems start to shine and oh how brightly they've shined this year! We offer a five-year design warranty on all new systems. In my 28-year career in irrigation, we've always had at least one significant dry period every five years. I am proud to say that we do not get callbacks during these periods. This is the standard to which systems should be designed. We can calculate distribution uniformity using catch cans, but this is not commonly done. A good dry spell though will show what we would see using catch cans.

**Service:** Even the best systems will need some tweaking occasionally. Leaks, although uncommon in our systems, can happen. It has always been our policy and procedure to respond quickly. You should have a clear understanding of the contractor's policy regarding follow up service.

**Company Staff:** It really comes down to this, all else being equal. What has been your experience so far with this company? Was your call answered in a friendly and professional manner or did you get a cell phone announcement asking you to leave a message? Was an appointment scheduled and did the consultant show up on time? Was the consultant knowledgeable and professional? Did he or she listen to your needs? Did you receive a detailed proposal indicating the material, proposed work and warranty? At Waterwise Irrigation, you will speak to and meet people who are experienced and knowledgeable, helpful, enthusiastic about their work, and committed to your satisfaction.

**Reputation:** Independent, non-solicited recommendations seem to be the best. Reports to organizations such as Angie's List and the Better Business Bureau cannot be directly controlled by the contractor.

Here are some factors that should be taken with a grain of salt.

**Licensed Irrigator** – Sure you better have a license; but having an irrigator's license doesn't make one a good irrigator any more than a driver's license makes one a good driver.

**Insurance** – Request an original Certificate of Insurance which must come from the agent, a photocopy will not do.

**Years in Business** – Experience is good but take it for what it's worth; it doesn't necessarily mean you're dealing with a company that installs quality systems. We know licensed irrigators that have been in business 15 – 20 years that install bad systems.

**References** – We've all heard of contractors who did horrible work but came with glowing references. Do you expect the contractor would give you bad references?!! Of course, good references are a plus, but how much weight should be given them is debatable.

## **Service and Repairs**

Superb service is provided by doing the job right the first time, being honest and fair, and doing so consistently. Here's what we offer.

**Systems:** Our office personnel can instantly check the schedules for all technicians. Therefore, your call is handled right then; no need to call back later. Your request can also be made through our website. Our database allows us to quickly access your previous service records, valuable information to help our technicians provide better service for you.

**Integrity:** It is systemic within our company. Honesty and fairness are characteristics of all business transactions at Waterwise Irrigation.

**Knowledge:** Everyone involved in the service department is thoroughly trained and receives ongoing training to provide you with on time scheduling with quick and accurate problem diagnosis and solutions.

**Service Agreements:** We offer Maintenance Service Agreements with several scheduling options. This is a great way to keep your system operating at peak performance and save money too. A written inspection report is provided at each visit.

## **Drainage**

An entire chapter could be written on drainage problems and their solutions. Please allow me to offer a few tips that may help you in selecting a drainage contractor and a proper solution.

- There should be a clear understanding about the design objectives. What is acceptable to another may not be for you. There are different degrees of drainage correction.
- Don't rely on trial and error methods of correction. The contractor should be able to provide calculations that indicate the system capacity. The #1 complaint we hear from homeowners who have systems is that the system failed to achieve the original design objective.
- Corrugated pipe is not approved for drainage systems in the cities of Houston, Bellaire, Memorial Villages, Sugar Land and many others. This is an inferior, short-lived product for several reasons.

- Drainage systems in Houston and most surrounding cities require a permit prior to construction.
- The contractor should be using a sight or laser level during construction to accurately determine available slope. If the contractor doesn't plan to...find another company.

If water is entering your home, don't rely on trial and error methods, hoping the system will work. At Waterwise Irrigation we know beforehand how effective our systems will be and you won't have any surprises. Our written five-year guarantee means we're serious about correcting your drainage problems.

## **WATERWISE IRRIGATION**

Ed Vitulli, *President*  
(832) 497-1087

Servicing the Greater Houston Area

# 10 Ways to Conserve Water And Save Money

By: Waterwise Irrigation

1. **Stop watering so much.** Sounds basic, but most people apply much more water than is needed to keep plants and lawn healthy. Some plants will drink as much water as you give them. This leads to the false assumption that they "need" that much water.
2. **Monitor the controller program.** This is amazing but many controllers (approximately 1/3) are set at the same schedule in December that was established in June.
3. **Install a rain sensor.** They are inexpensive and they work. Several types are available.
4. **Maintain your system.** One study reported that simply raising and straightening sprinklers will result in 20% less water usage.
5. **Use the seasonal adjust feature.** This is a quick and easy way to increase or decrease all run times in 5 or 10% increments.
6. **Use multiple programs.** Most controllers will have 3 or 4 programs available. Separate lawn and beds or other areas that have different water requirements. Lawns require watering less often than beds.
7. **Use multiple start times.** Using the multiple start times feature is an excellent way to minimize runoff. Instead of watering one 30 minute cycle, use three 10 minute segments, allowing time in between for the water to soak in.

8. **Turn the controller off.** From November through February, the controller should be in the OFF position and should be used on an "as needed" basis. This will work fine for the vast majority of landscapes.
9. **Get a second water meter.** Many cities, including Houston, allow you to purchase a second or "sprinkler" meter for outdoor water use. The sewer fee portion of the bill is waived. Most payback periods will be less than three years, many less than two.
10. **Get a professional evaluation.** Have a professional, one trained in evaluating sprinkler performance, do a thorough check of your system. This is not expensive and could save you plenty.





# 10

## Tilted Concrete Solutions

### Trip Hazard Elimination

Concrete is heavy. It may not be surprising that it can experience settling or sinking over time. Generally speaking, when the soil beneath a piece of cement is not stable enough to support the weight of the slab, the result is sinking concrete. This condition can affect the entire slab or just a portion. For example, if part of the concrete slab is adequately supported by the soil underneath and other sections are not, the unsupported pieces may crack and fall away from the other sections, resulting in uneven and unsightly cracked concrete.

#### **What are the primary causes of sinking concrete?**

Soil shrinkage, compaction and settling can cause concrete issues. Different types of soil have different load-bearing capacities. When a soil's load-bearing capacity is exceeded, the soil will compact and settle. It's also possible for the soil beneath a slab to settle and compact because of the nature of its composition. For example, soil that contains large amounts of clay and/or silt will shrink substantially as it dries out. As

the soil compacts underneath a concrete slab, this can cause sinking concrete. Usually, the damaged concrete slab cracks in one or more spots.

Soil wash out is another cause of sinking concrete. Because soil is susceptible to the effects of washout, the land that is underneath your driveway, patio, or concrete steps may not necessarily remain there to provide adequate support for the concrete slab. As water moves underneath your concrete surfaces, it can wash away the soil that's supporting the weight of the slab. As this happens, it creates a void, or empty space, underneath. Over time, your concrete slab can begin to sink or cave in with nothing to support it. Tilted Concrete Solutions specializes in filling voids beneath concrete surfaces to lift concrete back to its original position.

If you have sidewalks, patios, pool decks, or other sinking concrete surfaces, you may initially think your cement contractor is to blame for the eyesore. While poor workmanship and materials can certainly cause uneven concrete surfaces, shallow water tables and poor soil conditions can also wreak havoc on cement, causing sinking slabs. Besides being unsightly, sinking concrete driveways, patios, walkways, and steps can crack and create uneven surfaces causes major tripping hazards.

You'll be happy to know there is an easy solution for raising concrete slabs and eliminating trip hazards! Sinking concrete doesn't have to be a problem anymore! Tilted Concrete Solutions offers concrete lifting services that raise concrete slabs to a level position with less weight and destruction.

Traditionally, this problem is often repaired by mudjacking, a concrete repair technique for lifting concrete slabs that have settled over time by injecting a mortar-based mix beneath them. This injected material is a mixture of water, soil, sand,

and Portland cement that cures to become a solid, stable fill material. As the mixture is pumped underneath the sinking concrete, it fills all empty spaces and creates pressure on the slab, lifting it upwards. Once injected, the slurry then hardens into a solid fill that's more stable than the soil, yet lighter than concrete.

Tilted Concrete Solutions offers a fast, effective, and less invasive approach to raising concrete slabs, polyjacking. It offers a fast, effective, and less invasive approach to raising concrete slabs. Our system involves injecting an expanding polymer foam under the concrete for a durable, long-lasting solution.

Once injected beneath the sinking slab, the foam used in our sunken concrete repair reaches 90% rigidity within 30 minutes. Our concrete lifting foam cures to an inert substance within 15 minutes, making it safe for both your family and the environment. No mudjacking or polyjacking formula comes close to the Tilted Concrete brand! When compared to traditional concrete slurry compounds, expanding polyurethane foam can uphold significant loads without adding unnecessary weight to already unstable soil conditions. Also, expanding foam filler is waterproof whereas traditional fillers are not. This prevents future erosion and reduces repump rates.

As the mixture is pumped underneath the sinking concrete, it fills all empty spaces and creates pressure on the slab, lifting it upwards. Once injected, the slurry then hardens into a solid fill that's more stable than the soil, yet lighter than concrete. At Tilted Concrete Solutions Inc we believe a company is only as good as the products it sells and the people that work for it. We believe in hiring only the best employees to work for us. We also believe in providing the best customer service you will have. We have spent a lot of time researching different products looking for the best to use. Our philosophy is to always treat the job we do as if we were doing the job for our

mother. Top-notch companies make all the difference in the world. We show up on time, perform quality work in a professional manner, and guarantee our work. Tilted Concrete never uses contractors.

When dealing with Tilted Concrete from the estimation process down to the finished product I guarantee you will be satisfied. We will not quit until you are happy. Are there times that we run into problems? Yes. But in our business, there is always a solution. With our expertise we will solve the problem.

When a customer calls or requests a free estimate via our website, we ask to meet at your home for a reason. 1. We will not just do a drive by and guess where to look. 2. We want to meet with you so you can tell us and show us what your concerns are. 3. It is very important for you to understand the process of lifting the concrete. 4. We want to help you by letting you know why your concrete sank in the first place, by explaining how it happened and what you can do in the future to help keep it from happening again. By having this discussion, we will be able to provide a accurate estimate that you can understand

Please consider Tilted Concrete Solutions Inc as your company for trip hazard elimination, concrete leveling, and expansion joint replacement. We have been serving the greater Houston area since 2015. We offer a "one stop shopping experience".

Our number one goal is always to be straightforward and honest with all of our clients. Let us prove to you why we are "Absolutely the best". We can and will provide you a certificate of insurance, which list all our coverage and limits. We have been rated and recommended by BBB, Check A Pro, And Various other organizations. Our reviews are important to us

and we are proud that our customers want to leave reviews on us.

Our best advertisement is a happy and satisfied customer. We get a huge percentage of our work from former customers who tell their friends and family about us. When you meet us at your property, we will treat you like family. No high-pressure sales pitch, just a desire to help you. Call or go to our website, let us show you how we can turn your concrete problems into the beautiful home you have always dreamed of having.

**TILTED CONCRETE SOLUTIONS, INC.**

Doug Langston, *Owner*  
(281) 547-6313

Servicing the Greater Houston Area

# How To Keep Your Concrete From Sinking

By: Tilted Concrete

1. **Water Flow is critical.** Divert your rain gutter system from allowing the water flow from flowing next to the concrete surface.
2. **Sealing your expansion joints.** Note: the wood, or where the wood used to be is not a true expansion joint. Sealing an expansion joint is applying a material that will bond to the concrete edges and divert the water to the sides of the concrete. A true expansion joint sealant will expand and contract with the heating and cooling of the concrete, it will also move with the concrete. It also should not be susceptible to failing with exposure to the sun's UV rays.
3. **Back fill next to your concrete to direct water flow away from your concrete.** You should never be able to see the bottom of the concrete from the side. If you can see the bottom of the concrete add extra dirt and grass needed to keep your existing supporting soil in place.
4. Remember too much water and not enough water are the enemies of concrete.
5. **Remember every year you lose dirt from your yard due to settling and erosion.** Preventive maintenance every 3 years to add dirt to your yard will maintain the yard level and also keep your concrete from sinking.
6. In a Drought situation there really isn't much we can do except water your yard as much as you can next to your concrete

# 11

## Your Swimming Pool

### The Importance of Proper Swimming Pool Maintenance

What a treat it is to have your own swimming pool in your backyard. A swimming pool is a major investment in your property. On average a swimming pool build costs the homeowner \$60,000 here in Houston so it's important to keep your swimming pool properly maintained.

SSD Pools is a company based on the belief that our customers' needs are of the utmost importance. Our goal is to keep your pool clean and well maintained so it's always safe for your family to swim in. From a general service to underwater repairs and VGB drain conversions, chemical only pool service or complete pool cleanings, our entire team is committed to meeting those needs. Our goal is to leave you with an experience so great that you become our customer for life.

Hello, my name is Slade Dinn, the owner of SSD Pools. I have been helping homeowners with their swimming pools for

the past 5 years. I love to make people smile by keeping their pools and backyard oasis beautiful. This is a passion of mine. I get up every day and look forward to assisting my pool customers.

My business is like being a doctor. Instead of treating people or patients I treat your swimming pool. Pool maintenance is important for swimming pools because if swimming pools are not given enough time and attention, they can be unsafe. But it is important to note that pool maintenance is not just about making sure that the chlorine and pH levels are balanced or removing leaves from the pool through a rake.

Pool maintenance may sound simple, but it requires a reasonable amount of knowledge about pools. If you don't find time to learn all of them, you can be susceptible to pool maintenance mistakes. Here are some of them:

1. Not Brushing the Pool
2. Underestimating Pool Shock
3. Not Replacing the Pool Water
4. Adding Too Much Chlorine
5. Adding Chlorine While the Sun is Up
6. Not Covering the Pool
7. Not Cleaning the Pool Filter
8. Refusing to Vacuum
9. Thinking Pool Shock Alone Can Solve Black Algae Problems



## 10. Not Cleaning the Area Surrounding the Pool

If you are doing even one of the aforementioned pool maintenance mistakes, a lot of people are guilty of doing; I assure you that you are not alone! I understand that it is not easy to remember all the ways to properly clean and maintain a pool, though, and that's why we are not here to judge.

However, if after reading this chapter you keep on doing whatever it is you are doing wrong, then that is not good both for your pool and for yourself. If you want your pool to last a long time, you should be mindful of these pool maintenance mistakes so you can avoid pool problems in the future.

### **Should I service my swimming pool myself?**

Ah! That's a great question! Do you think it's difficult? There are people who are willing to do the work for you in exchange of a certain amount of money. It is not expensive, so don't worry about it. The good thing about it is that you can focus on doing other more important things than dealing with your pool.

Another thing is that you don't have to internalize all of the most common pool maintenance mistakes mentioned above because there are people who already know all of them by heart!

Cleaning and maintaining a pool are not easy. It is not the same as cleaning a bathtub where you just brush the tub and that's it. You can't just remove the floating leaves using a rake either.

Chlorine? No, you don't just add chlorine into the water and let it do the cleaning. In fact, chlorine just disinfects the water and not really clean the whole pool!

Of course, it is possible for one person, the owner for example, to clean a pool. However, that's only if he or she is willing to deal with more severe wastes in the future. Note that to properly, thoroughly, and deeply clean a pool is not a one-man job!

Our pool cleaning service is basically a company that offers services that are all about pool maintenance. Our services include, among others:

1. Pool vacuuming
2. Inspections
3. Checking the water filtration
4. Ensuring that the pH, chlorine, and water levels are just right
5. Determining whether or not your pool equipment needs to be replaced
6. Are your machines working properly? Will they still be okay one month later?
7. Cleaning the pool floors, walls, stairs, etc.

We have a team of professionals who have acquired a certain level of expertise in pool cleaning through the training and seminars they have gone through and attended, respectively.

### **Why Should You Hire a Pool Cleaning Service for Your Pool?**

One major factor that makes pool cleaning service different from you is the fact that it is professional. That is, it is a business and you are a person. It is bound by rules and

regulations while you have the freedom to do whatever you want. It has a boss or a leader while you are your own boss and leader.

In terms of the quality of cleaning, a pool cleaning service is more reliable than yourself. No, I am not here to insult your cleaning skills. Our pool cleaning service has numerous cleaners under it, so teamwork is involved. Having said that, even though you are detail-oriented and are a clean freak, our results will still be better, or greater, than yours.

Also, more often than not, a pool cleaning service has complete pool cleaning supplies. In your case, however, I bet there is even one thing that is missing in your stockroom.

You can expect a pool cleaning service to do proper cleaning because it is their responsibility to do so. But you, maybe after a few hours you would find yourself sitting on a chair, scrolling through your social media feed or sleeping.

Perhaps you are still confused and unsure if you really have to hire a pool cleaning service for your pool even after reading all of what's stated above. That's okay, and I am willing to state more specific points just so you understand further the importance of a pool cleaning service.

## **Here are six reasons to hire a pool cleaning service.**

**1. Your Pool is Wide:** It is exhausting to do all the cleaning by yourself if the area to be cleaned is too wide, I know. But you don't have to even say hello to your sweat if you let a pool cleaning service do the job for you!

Regardless of the size of your pool, they wouldn't be intimidated and scared because, for sure, the pool cleaners have already been in the industry for years, so they already know what to do!

We wouldn't miss anything, even that tiny leaf that got stuck on the pool filter.

**2. You Have Lots of Pools:** You can't be able to clean all of your pools in equal measure if you have lots of pools. It won't hurt to bring a pool cleaning service in and let them help you or even handle all for you. In fact, they would even love it when you ask for their help because that's what they enjoy doing!

Plus, the good thing about a pool cleaning service is that there are several people in there that work together, so the job can be accomplished in no time!

**3. You Don't Have All the Equipment Needed:** If you want your pools to be thoroughly cleaned, you should make sure that you have all the equipment needed. Among the supplies that are used for pool cleaning include:

1. Pool net
2. Pool brush
3. Skimmer
4. Hose
5. Leaf Rake

If your supplies are incomplete, then you must reach out to a pool cleaning service for your pool. Be assured that they have all the things that can improve the condition of your pool, so you shouldn't second guess about this anymore!

**4. Your Equipment is Not High-Quality:** No one's stopping you from making use of low-quality equipment and machines for your pool because that's your preference to begin with. However, if you already know that yourself, hiring a pool

cleaning service shouldn't be an option anymore—it should be a choice!

You can use your lower-quality materials for everyday cleaning, but you should let the professionals handle it at least every week or two to avoid having to deal with massive damages!

**5. You Have a Busy Schedule:** If you have a lot on your plate and have lots of items to tick off on your to-do list, then that is a sign that you should hire a pool cleaning service for your pool. Don't bother making a room for pool cleaning on your schedule and just let other people who are knowledgeable about the task do it for you.

Just imagine how much easier and smooth sailing your day would be if you focus on the things that are more important and definitely more fun than dealing with algae.

**6. You Don't Have Expertise:** This is perhaps the most important factor that should already be enough for you to hire a pool cleaning service. Cleaning a pool is not just about taking the leaves out of the pool water. It is about keeping the pH and chlorine levels in check, shocking the pool, making sure the generators are working, and the list goes on.

If you care about the swimmers' safety, you should hire a pool cleaning expert to check the condition of your pools because if you would just rely on the knowledge that you have gotten from the internet, then there would be things that you would miss out on!

Cleaning a pool properly requires deep knowledge about the process and the equipment involved.

**7. You Need It:** You should hire a pool cleaning service because you need it. No matter how good you are at making

excuses, you need it. Your pools must be safe and healthy for other people to use, and that would never be possible if you would trust your belief that you don't need a pool cleaning service.

Yes, you are cleaning your pools every day. But that doesn't mean that every day you are eliminating all the unpleasant organisms and entities that have made your pools their home. Germs are not visible to the naked eye, so don't be sure!

In conclusion, there is nothing wrong with being so doubtful about hiring a pool cleaning service because, well, maybe there is really something to be doubtful of. But it is not a smart decision to ditch the option to hire a pool cleaning service just because we are not free!

You see, if you hesitate on spending money to give your pool the proper care it needs, you will have to deal with more damages and problems in the future. A pool cleaning service is filled with people who are experts in the field of pool maintenance. If you want to be sure that your pools are safe, it's always smarter to hire a professional!

If you notice that your pool is changing its color for the worse, we promise to make a real splash! Please feel free to contact me at any time.

## **SSD POOLS**

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Servicing the Katy Area

# 10 Pool Maintenance Mistakes You Should Avoid

By: SSD Pools

There are hundreds of pool maintenance mistakes that most pool owners are guilty of doing. However, it would take us more than a day to talk about all of them here. We limited the number to 10 and just included the most common ones in the list.

1. **Not Brushing the Pool:** Lots of pool owners assume that it is okay not to brush the pool because chlorine alone can kill all the dirt, bacteria, and germs that attempt to live in the pool. But the thing is, that's not true! Chlorine does help disinfect the pool and make it safe for people to use, that's true. However, that doesn't mean that it can make the pool germ-free.
2. **Underestimating Pool Shock:** Pool shock is important to be done at least every week because there are harmful microorganisms that can survive in pool water that contains appropriate amount of chlorine, like black algae. Most people think the best way to shock a pool is to pour the product directly into the water. Don't make that mistake! Mix it with water first.
3. **Not Replacing the Pool Water:** Because chlorine and the filtration system can keep the water clean for a very long time— many believe you never need to replace your pool water. In some way, that is true, because one of the advantages of using chlorine is that it helps you save water. However, that's not to say that you shouldn't replace the pool water at all. The good news is, you don't have to do that every year, and not even every two years. According to experts,

changing pool water once every five to seven years is what's ideal.

4. **Adding Too Much Chlorine:** Chlorine used for pools is a safer type of chlorine. However, that doesn't mean that it is okay to add too much of it in your pool. The reason why pool chlorine isn't harmful is because the amount is not enough. If you add too much or too little, the pool becomes unhealthy because it would cause people to have irritated skin and to acquire illnesses caused by bacteria, respectively.

Here's how to determine the right amount of chlorine to put into your pool:

$$1 \text{ ppm} = (1 \text{ pound chlorine}) / (1,000,000 \text{ pounds water})$$

5. **Adding Chlorine While the Sun is Up:** If you add chlorine into your pool while the sun is up or the temperature is warm, it wouldn't help at all. Chlorine becomes impotent with heat, so do it at night.
6. **Not Covering the Pool:** If you don't cover the pool when no one is using it, you are just making things difficult for you. Lots of germs and dirt will fall onto it, making it difficult to clean up later.
7. **Not Cleaning the Pool Filter:** Just because a pool filter's job is to clean the pool water through a filtration system doesn't mean that it also does clean itself with its own system. You have to check from time to time if it is still working properly, is not clogged, and doesn't have broken parts. Pool filter will not be efficient anymore once it wears out. A pool filter's role in swimming pools is huge, so you really have to keep an eye on it and replace or fix it as soon as possible if it is not functioning well.



8. **Refusing to Vacuum:** It is one of pool filter's job to remove the debris from pool. However, that's only if the debris is floating on the water. Those that are at the bottom or the sides are beyond it, and that's why you should also vacuum your pool regularly. Not vacuuming your pool may lead to pool stains, and pool stains take more work than just turning on the pool vacuum. It shouldn't take an hour, and the machine will do all the work, so this shouldn't be exhausting!
  
9. **Thinking Pool Shock Alone Can Solve Black Algae Problems:** Removing black algae requires brushing the area and other things, including pool shock. However, pool shock alone can't solve black algae problems. No matter how strong pool shock is, there is a limitation to its prowess. That is, it may indeed kill black algae. However, there is no assurance that the roots planted at the narrowest spaces of the pool are also killed.
  
10. **Not Cleaning the Area Surrounding the Pool:** You shouldn't only take care of the swimming pool but also the areas that surround it. Bacteria and germs are living organisms and they can go from one place to another. If you refuse to pay attention to the surroundings and just focus on the pool area, just imagine how easier it would be for your pool to go from "healthy" to "dangerous."



# **Section 5**

**Real Estate**



# 12

## Get It Sold!

### Bringing it Home for You

Your home most likely will be one of your largest financial investments. Selling your home may seem like a daunting task, but it doesn't have to be that way. Crucial to maximizing the return on your investment, hiring an experienced real estate agent, who cares about you and the successful sale of your home, makes this process as hassle free as possible. The right agent can help make the selling experience less daunting and more enjoyable.

When you hire a broker/agent (the agent works on behalf of the broker) through a listing agreement, both the broker and agent have a fiduciary responsibility to you, the client. The fiduciary relationship is based on trust and means your agent must always work for your best interest and on your behalf. The broker/agent must maintain confidentiality, accurate records, including accounting of funds related to the sale, and the disclosure of all information gathered during the sale concerning your property.

As in any relationship, communication strengthens the partnership between seller and agent. A great agent creates a

strong communication strategy, and not only should your agent be available for calls, texts, and emails, but also needs to express how communications are handled if they are in a meeting or if you want to talk after hours. The agent should ask you, the seller, your preferred method of communication and develop a plan accordingly.

No matter how great an agent, issues will arise during the course of a real estate sale. Problem solving skills are the hallmark of a great agent, as they often need to find options for issues that come up during the transaction. A great question to ask an agent during your interview is "Tell me about a situation when you had an issue during the course of a sale transaction and how you solved it."

There are many agents in the real estate business. You will want to find out how long he/she has been in business and if this is a full-time career for the agent. Full time agents tend to have more experience, are more in tune with the market daily and are available to show your home to prospective buyers on short notice. While interviewing, ask the agent if they have references that you may contact and/or any client reviews.

Once you sign a listing agreement, the real estate agent is now able to work on your behalf.

"What is my home worth?" As agents, we are able to help you find the best list price for your property, however, we are not appraisers thus not able to determine value. There are many factors that impact list price such as inventory, how fast property is moving, time of year, property condition and location. Your agent should provide a market report, not just comparables, so you are able to make informed decisions about the list price. Remember that the property must compete in a pool of other properties that are similar, and your property needs to stand out in a positive way to the consumer.

As part of the pricing strategy, the agent should perform a visual assessment of the overall condition of the home by walking through it with you. This assessment often includes notes of items that have been upgraded or repairs that are needed, which are often used to help determine the list price. When pricing a property choose wisely.

To update or not to update is an age-old question. The agent should help you assess what updates are important for your particular property and market. Sometimes, all it takes is a great, neutral paint throughout the home to freshen up the interior. In some cases, the updates could be larger, depending on the situation. For example, installing new flooring can be a good choice to freshen up the house. A tip about flooring, be consistent by using the same flooring throughout the house. It is fine to utilize a combination of tile, wood and carpet, but be sure room to room to use the same tile, the same wood and the same carpet. This strategy will present a more consistent and unified look for the property and will appeal to more buyers.

If you are going to do any type of major renovation, the biggest bang for your buck are kitchens and bath renovations as these tend to make the largest impact to potential buyers. Again, be sure to assess, with the help of your agent and your home contractor, if this is a good strategy. These updates may help you sell your home faster, but most updates will not equate to a 100% return on investment. Your agent and contractor should be able to help you determine the return on investment of the renovation or updates.

You also need to consider where the updates place your property within the like and kind comparables. For example, being highest priced home in an older neighborhood may not be the best strategy, unless the entire neighborhood is being renovated before resale. Another example may be, depending on the price point of property within the market,

putting carrara marble tile in a home may not be the best strategy when the neighborhood standard is carrara-look porcelain tile. This is where your agent will help you understand the market.

When renovating or updating have a clear "exit strategy" in mind. The style needs to be neutral. Any buyer should be able to drop their personal belongings into the property and move right in without feeling they need to update or renovate again. Too specific a design limits the buyer pool. The more specific your design (more personal to you), the narrower the buyer field.

As you finish preparing the property for sale, there are a few items to consider. Be sure to address major items, especially if they are not functional, such as the HVAC system, water heater, and roof. Have a licensed professional look at your systems and make repairs as needed. Ask a reputable roofer to take a look and tap down shingles, seal around vent openings and other items that need addressed. Additionally, check functionality all the appliances staying with the property, making sure they are clean and in good working order. Having these items addressed before the sale should help keep repair negotiations to a minimum.

You will also want to address the small issues in your house too. Look at the ceiling for signs of leaks, and if identified, address the source of the leak, and repair and paint the ceiling. Fill holes in the walls from decor or doorknob strikes, fix doors that tend to close on their own, and repair trim and/or corners of walls that have been damaged. Deep clean the property and be sure this includes hiring a reputable, professional carpet and tile cleaning company. One last tip from this agent...be sure to clean the light switch plates, but especially the spaces immediately around the light switches themselves. Use a dry toothbrush to get in the grooves. When you have completed your list, take another look at the



house as if you were the buyer and ask your agent to confirm all problem areas have been addressed.

Please consider me, Wendi Lacki, CB&A Realtors, to be your "go to" REALTOR®. I am a full-time, multi-million dollar producing agent who also believes in the value of individual attention. I care about my clients and understand the financial stakes. I work to understand client needs and provide advice based on data gathered during the process. My goal is to close every listing and also find the best next home for my clients. I respect your budget and your bottom line and will do my best to make sure your dollars are honored. I endeavor to meet and exceed my client expectations, and I love what I do.

It is my number one goal to communicate with my clients in a straightforward, easy to understand manner and make transparent the real estate sale and purchase process to every person I meet.

I am available to help and would enjoy meeting you personally to discuss your real estate needs over a friendly, no-pressure cup of coffee so you can gather information that will help you make the best decision for you. If you should have any questions about the preceding information, the current real estate market, or general real estate information, feel free to reach out by phone and/or text message. I look forward to Bringing It Home For You!

**CB&A REALTORS**

Wendi Lacki, REALTOR®, GRI, SRS, ABR, PSA, AWREP  
(281) 771-0985

Servicing the Katy Area

## Home Selling Tips

By: Wendi Lacki, CB&A Realtors

Below are some wonderful tips for getting your home prepped and ready to sell.

1. To increase curb appeal, power wash your driveway and walkways, sweep and remove cobwebs in the doorway, trim bushes, mow the lawn, and add a pop of color with flowering plants.
2. Paint exterior trim, re-stain your front door, and repair your garage door to freshen up the outside even more.
3. Repair big ticket items such as HVAC, roof, water heater.
4. Rent a pod or storage bay or hire a moving company for your things so you can declutter the inside of the house.
5. Declutter the inside of the house. Clear counter tops and surfaces and minimize furniture, if possible. Clean out our closets by half and then reduce by half again.
6. Depersonalize by removing personal pictures, sports memorabilia, and other personal items. You want the buyers to visualize this house as theirs.
7. Stage your home to sell. If you are living in the property, you can use your furniture and items, but consider hiring a staging expert to show you how to display décor and arrange furniture for the most effective and photograph friendly views of each room.

# 13

## The Home Inspection

### What Really Matters

For most of us, purchasing a home is the most important purchase we will make in our lifetime. Your home will also be the most expensive purchase you'll make in your lifetime. As a home inspector, I'm here for you, the homeowner, buyer and/or seller. I love what I do and have great passion for inspecting your next home. I feel so strongly about the importance of a home inspection, our slogan is "We Report and Educate So You Can Negotiate". This truly is our foundation at Key Rose inspections.

Inspection time is the time to find out what the deficiencies are in the home, as well as positive aspects of the inspection findings. In my experience, most homes are generally in good condition but often have some deficiencies. That's why we say, "We Report and Educate So You Can Negotiate". This is a critical time to get the best deal on the house you will potentially purchase. There are two main points to consider:

One, is to get a lower price on the property. And two, is to get the seller to pay for the required repairs listed in the inspection report.

A little bit more about me. My name is Ali Quiroz and I love what I do! I'm on every inspection and work closely with the buyer during the entire process. There is one very unique feature about me, it's my size. I'm what I call a sub-compact sized inspector. This allows me to get into smaller places such as attics and crawlspaces where ordinary people just won't fit.

It is critical that your home inspector survey/inspect all areas of the structure and property. Here is what I include in all my standard home inspections -

1. **Structural** (Foundation, Drainage, Roof, Attic, Garage, Fence)
2. **Electrical** (Main/Sub Panels, Receptacles, Fixtures & Visible Wiring)
3. **HVAC** (Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning System & Ducts)
4. **Plumbing** (Visible Pipes, Fixtures & Water Heater)
5. **Appliances** (Permanently Installed)

We also can inspect for mold, termites and inspect irrigation systems and swimming pools.

Something that most sellers do not consider is a pre-listing home inspection. A pre-listing inspection, which is paid for by the home seller or listing agent, provides a written report as to the condition of the property. It could uncover any concerns that might compromise a sale. Typically, home inspections are paid for by the buyer and performed right

before closing the sale of the home. By performing a pre-listing inspection, the seller can determine what the deficiencies are in the property before a potential buyer walks into the home. I personally don't like surprises and would strongly recommend a pre-listing home inspection to anyone thinking of listing their property.

I also perform inspections for homeowners interested in knowing the 'State of The House'. In other words, an inspection for a homeowner just curious if their home is in good condition. Please consider that over time the foundation will shift, the roof ages, the systems such as plumbing and electrical can begin to fail. Through a thorough home inspection, I can find issues which if addressed at that time could save the homeowner a lot time and money down the road. Another advantage to having this inspection is it allows you address items when it is time to sell your home.

I'm a member of InterNACHI®. InterNACHI® is the world's leading association for home inspectors. This is an association I'm proud to be a member of. We are held to the highest standards and receive great support from this organization.

The home inspection is so important in the purchasing process. Please don't look at the home inspection as a 'Necessary Evil'. This is a great opportunity for you, the buyer, to learn about the largest purchase you will ever make before you sit down at the closing table. Remember **I'm Here to Report and Educate So You Can Negotiate.**

## **KEY ROSE INSPECTIONS**

Ali Quiroz, *Professional Real Estate Inspector*  
(281) 881-2618

Servicing the Greater Houston Area

## The Ins and Outs of Home Inspection

By: Key Rose Inspections

1. Hire a home inspector for you. Don't rely on another professional or individual to select an inspector that is right for you. You are paying for the inspection. You should choose an unbiased inspector.
2. Always hire an inspector before finalizing the purchase of the property. Know what you are buying.
3. Require a full inspection report from your home inspector. This should include detailed information with accompanying photos detailing the defects or items requiring attention.
4. Require your home inspector to provide consultation in person or over the phone. It is important that you, the buyer know all that you can before making such an investment in a property.
5. Don't just go through the motions. A home inspection is not just something that should be 'rubber stamped'. Take the time and make the financial investment in a good home inspector.

## Check A Pro

Who is Check A Pro? Check A Pro is your local resource for finding pre-qualified home service providers. From Air Conditioning repair to Window Replacement, our exclusive resource of local professionals are here to serve you!

Start your search today at [www.checkapro.com](http://www.checkapro.com)!

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## Pre-qualification

How do we pre-qualify? It is our goal to offer homeowners a select group of qualified home service providers. We have hand selected and interviewed all providers to ensure the highest quality possible.

### **All pre-qualified home service providers have supplied Check A Pro with the following:**

- ✓ Liability Insurance (Certificate of Insurance)
- ✓ Licenses where required by state law
- ✓ Homeowner References
- ✓ Financial Review
- ✓ One on One Interview with Owner of Service Company

*Disclaimer: Check A Pro has conducted the aforementioned reference checks and reviews at time of service provider agreement signing. These references may be reviewed by appointment with Check A Pro. Check A Pro will not be held liable for any misconduct of its membership. Check A Pro does not conduct extensive background checks on its home service providers or its employees. It is strongly recommended that the consumer conduct the necessary detailed background checks prior to hiring a home service provider.*



## Check A Pro Joe On The Radio

I have been communicating to radio audiences for over 35 years. It is a great honor to be available to you, the homeowner, through our home improvement radio show –The Check A Pro Radio Show.

Every Sunday I make myself available to all of you 'Weekend Warriors' working on your homes. Listeners call in and ask if I can personally recommend a contractor for a project. I also interview select Check A Pro home service providers and ask the questions that you want answered.

Have a question about home improvement or how we pre-qualify our service providers? Feel free to email me at anytime at [joe@checkapro.com](mailto:joe@checkapro.com).

The Check A Pro Radio Show can be heard every 12:00 PM on KNTH 1070AM, or you can simply log on and listen to any of our podcasts at [www.checkaproradioshow.com](http://www.checkaproradioshow.com). I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Jim Klauck  
**A.K.A. Check A Pro Joe**



Scan to Connect



## Check A Pro VIP Club Card


Congratulations! Here is your FREE \$25 Check A Pro VIP Club Card! Please cut this out and use this as your temporary card. To order your permanent card, please log on to [checkapro.com](http://checkapro.com) and click "Gift Card". Then select the option to claim your FREE VIP Club Card. Cards will be mailed out within 5 business days.

Your Check A Pro VIP Club Card entitles you to \$25 off an invoice with any of our participating service providers. For more information about how to use the VIP club card, visit us online at [checkapro.com](http://checkapro.com).

\*Tip: The \$25 VIP Club Card can be used multiple times with different participating members!



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