

1. Licensing

Handyman rules are set by each state, and often by the county or city. Start here, before you advertise a single job.

Look up the rule before you advertise or quote a job. Many states and cities limit what a handyman can do without a contractor license. The limit may depend on the size of the job, the type of work, or both. Electrical, plumbing, gas and HVAC work usually has to be done by a licensed tradesperson. This kit does not list any state's limits. Your state licensing board and your city or county building department do.

- ☐ **Find your state's contractor licensing board.** Search for your state name plus "contractor license board" and use the official state website.
- ☐ **Ask what work you may do without a contractor license.** Ask whether the limit is by job size, by type of work, or both. Ask how it is counted: labor only or labor and materials, and per job, per project or per customer.
- ☐ **Ask which work always needs a licensed trade.** Electrical, plumbing, gas and HVAC are the usual ones. Ask about work that touches the structure of the building too.
- ☐ **Go down the Job Pricer sheet one job at a time** and ask: "Can I do this, and can I advertise it?" Ask about any job near wiring, water or gas lines, such as a TV mount that needs cables run inside a wall, a hardwired smoke alarm or a faucet swap.
- ☐ **Ask what you may call yourself and what goes on your paperwork.** Some places limit the word "contractor." Some require a license or registration number on estimates, contracts, invoices, ads and the truck.
- ☐ **Ask whether your state or city has a separate registration** for home improvement or handyman work.
- ☐ **Write a list of the jobs you will do and the jobs you will refer to a licensed trade.** Stick to it, even when a customer asks nicely. If a job turns out to need a licensed trade, stop and refer it.
- ☐ **Ask about lead-safe rules.** Homes built before 1978 may have lead paint, and rules can cover repair work that disturbs it. Ask the EPA (epa.gov) and your state before you take jobs that cut, sand or scrape painted surfaces in older homes.

Business license and permits

- ☐ **Get a city or county business license or registration** if your area requires one. Check where the business is based and where you work, since they can differ.
- ☐ **Learn how permits work** in each city or county you work in: which jobs need one (decks and fences are common ones to ask about), who pulls it, what it costs and how inspections get booked. Whether a job needs a permit and whether you need a license for it are two separate questions. Check both.
- ☐ **Put renewal dates on your calendar.** Keep copies of every license, registration and permit in one folder.