

# Home Remodeling Code Violations





# INTRODUCTION

At some point, every homeowner considers renovating or remodeling. Home design ideas may be simple repairs or improvements, or they could involve taking a whole section of the house down to the studs. Either way, even a small project requires understanding home building codes. Failing to follow those codes can lead to fines, legal issues, and potential liability. Here are some of the most common code violations when renovating a home.





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## First Things First: Get A Permit



Some people consider not getting a permit in order to save money and reduce paperwork for their home designs. This is a poor choice and any savings in the near-term will be dwarfed by costs in the long-term. Building inspectors know all the relevant housing codes and will ensure your renovation is in compliance. Without permits, no reputable inspector will be willing to work with you. Homeowners are allowed to do their own improvements without a contractor's license but still need to get a permit for many renovation and remodeling projects.

Getting a permit is important for a lot of reasons and you'll have confidence that your improvements are safe and reliable. Any work will comply with the most recent energy and water-conservation measures, which can save you money and make your home more attractive to prospective buyers. Also, an inspector will likely identify work that doesn't meet code when you try to sell. The buyer may require you to fix any code violation before making an offer, adding to the expense of selling the home. Even worse, you could be sued for repairs or damage if the work is discovered after the sale.





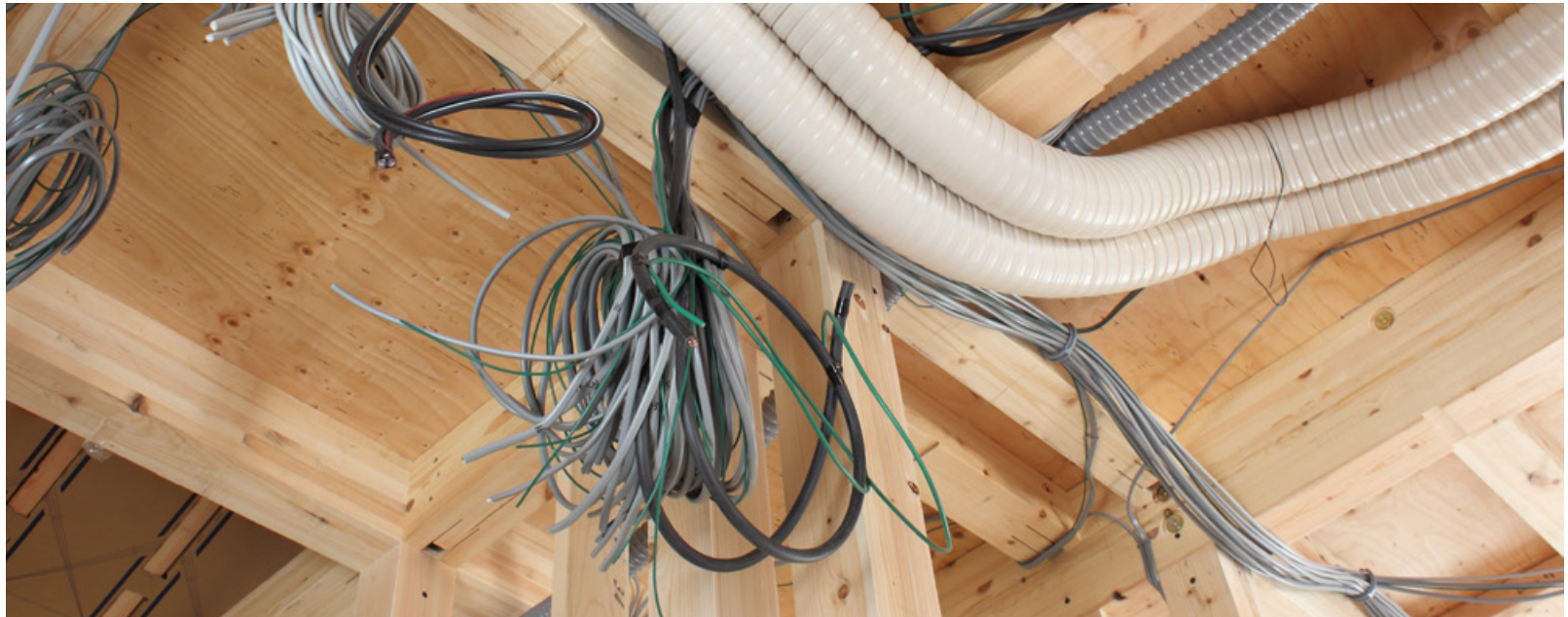
## Handrails



Handrails look simple and can be installed quickly, but they can be the source of a lot of regulatory headaches. You're violating code unless the ends of a wall-side handrail make a 90-degree turn and dead-end into the wall. It seems unnecessary, but the open ends of a handrail can snag a loose piece of clothing and cause an accident. Make sure your design meets code before you begin renovating a staircase.



# Electrical



**Junction Box:** These devices protect electrical connections and help prevent fires in the home. You will always fail a code inspection if electrical connections are not made inside an approved junction box.

There are several code violations specific to junction boxes:

- Junction boxes must always be visible and accessible.
- Wire ends inside junction boxes should be at least six inches long.
- Wires entering a junction box must be clamped to the box to prevent them from being moved or damaged.

**Missing GFCIs.** A GFCI, or ground-fault circuit interrupter, is required for any circuit that services an area where water might be present, such as bathrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms, garages, and outdoor receptacles. A single GFCI at the beginning of a circuit can protect other receptacles on the same circuit.







## Windows



When renovating windows you need to consider their condition, location, and type of glass. Building codes in new homes require that windows are tempered or safety glazed if they are installed near stairs, doorways, showers, or anywhere where an accident is more likely.

Here are a few things to consider when evaluating your windows:

- Do the window frames have wind load labels?
- Do you have double or triple glazing to provide insulation and to resist impact?
- Can you find visible fasteners that confirm that windows have been securely installed?

## Outdoor



**Incorrectly-fastened deck ledgers:** The material that actually connects the deck to the house can be difficult to safely install. Using regular nails as fasteners or failing to use flashing can result in the deck slowly separating from the side of the house. According to one study, approximately half of the 40 million residential decks in the United States would not meet modern code requirements. Make sure to check your deck ledger is securely fastened before doing any remodeling on your deck.

**Improper fence heights:** Many cities and HOAs have strict rules regulating the height of fences. Those rules can be stringent; you will likely be required to remove or modify a fence that exceeds the height requirement by only a few inches. Make sure you check local requirements before you begin digging or purchasing materials.



# Hazardous Materials



Older buildings can contain dangerous building materials that are hazardous to your health if ingested. States mandate certain processes to dispose of those materials, which could be released as dust during construction activity. State laws are designed to protect you as well as trash removal workers and landfill operators who may come in contact with contaminated home materials. Here are two of the most common hazardous materials found in old homes:

**Asbestos:** This material was often used in construction before 1970 and can be found in the following parts of the home:

- Popcorn ceiling texture
- Drywall joint compound
- Vermiculite attic insulation
- Vinyl tile
- Hot-water pipe and duct insulation
- Cement shingle siding

Independent testing facilities can determine if asbestos is present in home samples. However, it can be dangerous to even collect those samples. Asbestos dust can cause numerous health issues if inhaled. Don't just start digging samples out of your walls: if you suspect there is asbestos in your home, contact your local building authority or regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office. A representative will be able to advise on the safest way to collect and test samples.

**Lead paint:** This material been outlawed since 1978 and can cause developmental issues in children. Contractors are prohibited from working on a home without precautions to contain and dispose of lead. Homeowners don't face those same requirements. However, if you hire a contractor to work on your home, that person must adhere to those requirements or face fines of up to \$37,500 per day. DIY lead test kits are easy to use but you can put your own health at risk if you cut, scrape, or sand lead-contaminated materials.

## Venting



Renovating a bathroom can expose you to a number of subtle code violations you might not have considered. Bathroom venting is one concern that a lot of homeowners overlook. Bathroom vents must connect to an opening in the roof or attic wall. When renovating a bathroom, cutting a hole in the ceiling to install an exhaust fan can seriously damage your house. An internal vent just allows humid air to collect as moisture in your attic, leading to rot or mold. Over time, the degradation of wood or other materials in the attic can be costly to replace and could potentially cause structural issues.

# Fire



The best way to prevent a fire and protect your family is a smoke detector. Building codes require that smoke detectors must be placed on every level of a home, within every sleeping area, and outside of every bedroom door. Smoke detectors installed on ceilings must be at least four inches away from the wall and those installed on walls must be four to 12 inches from the intersection of the wall and ceiling. It's also advisable to place alarms at least three feet from HVAC vents, ceiling fans, and lighting fixtures. In new buildings, smoke alarms must be hardwired and include a battery backup. In addition, multiple alarms must be wired as a network so that all alarms go off simultaneously. When you renovate your home you'll be required to update any battery-only alarms to meet the current requirements. Good smoke detectors are like insurance and spending the money now significantly reduces the risk of damage later.

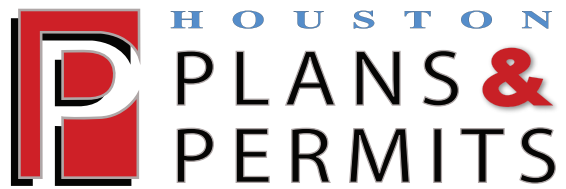




## Conclusion

A renovation or remodel is a wonderful way to develop a modern home design. You can give your home a new look or personalize the rooms you use the most. However, a remodel can be a tricky process as you navigate obvious and subtle building codes. You need to understand building codes before you hammer the first nail; the only thing worse than not knowing the relevant codes is figuring them out after the work has already been completed. The cost of your remodel can balloon and you risk legal fees if your not-up-to-code project causes any injuries. Make sure to contact home designer Houston Plans & Permits to make sure your project is up to code so you can start that remodel you've always wanted.

Contact Houston Plans & Permits today at (281) 717-6514 or visit us at [www.plansandpermits.net](http://www.plansandpermits.net).



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