

# SAFE, SOUND AND SECURE

**Good design and well-considered renovations will add value to your property and to your lifestyle. Planning and implementing changes that incorporate sensible safety and security measures will enhance the return on the investment, in time and money that you will receive from your property upgrades.**

Investment in sensible design and safety decisions is essential in today's environment. Many sectors of the community are affected from financial and personal stress brought on not only by our current economy, but also our aging population and a lack of basic DIY skills.

It is all very well that we focus on adding value to our property from an aesthetic point of view, but sometimes pleasing to the eye is not always practical.

Property owners who incorporate a holistic approach to ensure they have a safe, sound and secure home will benefit themselves and also the future residents of the property. Approached sensibly and correctly the value you can add to a property using this approach will be worth more than other investment you may have contemplated in the past.

## Universal Design

Consider a few design elements which will ensure that your property will be suitable now and in the future by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life:

- > Wider doorways more readily accommodate wheelchairs, walking aids and also makes it easier to accommodate furniture;
- > A downstairs toilet and sizeable bathroom;
- > At least one shower should be a wet area variety;
- > Kitchens designed with workbenches at two different heights will accommodate standing and sitting users;
- > Fit lever taps and lever door handles, with loop handles on kitchen or bathroom cabinets;
- > Place light switches parallel with door handles so they are easy to locate;
- > Place power points 500mm above the floor to minimise bending;

- > Extra nogs and studs, particularly around toilets and showers, for retrofitting hand rails and along staircases to accommodate a possible inclusion of a future stair lift;
- > Handrails on both sides of stairs and steps.

## Lifemark

Lifemark certification ([www.lifemark.co.nz](http://www.lifemark.co.nz)) fosters and promotes standards of design and building that work for people across all ages and stages of life, and to increase awareness of health and safety at home. The 5 Lifetime Design Principles include:

- 1. Usability:** uncomplicated, safe, well-suited to their purpose, and easily used by people with differing abilities and includes features such as reachable power points and easy to use taps, window latches and light switches.
- 2. Adaptability:** cost-effectively and simply adapted to meet people's changing needs, or to suit different users and includes features such as bathroom and kitchen design that are future orientated for the occupants changing needs.
- 3. Accessibility:** providing easy access the ability to move around freely and includes having space for circulation spaces and in bedroom and entrance design.
- 4. Safe:** to include features that prevent injuries in the home especially from slips, trips and falls and includes lighting design, slip-resistant surfaces and step less entry options.
- 5. Lifetime value:** effective design saves a considerable amount of money if you later decided to fit any of these features and for a marginal, if any cost should you use them at the time of construction.

It is important that you follow these basic principles as part of your renovation or improvement plans. Think of the long-term implications of the decisions you make today – are they going to suit the needs of you or your family in ten or twenty years time? Even if you are not making improvements to suit your current situation, research your potential market, and ensure that the improvements you make are suitable for the needs of the widest

range of potential buyers. You should also consider how your improvements will impact on visitors to your home (such as aging relatives).

## Child Safety

Every year thousands of New Zealand children are injured so badly that they are admitted to hospital. It is a sad fact that our children are twice as likely to die through injury as children who live in Australia and three times as likely as a child from England or Wales.

Unintentional injury is considered one of the most serious public health problems facing children in the industrialised world today. Most injuries are predictable and, therefore, are preventable – ensure that you research about how simple changes around your home can make it a safe environment for children.

## Home Safety

While no one wants to think of their comfortable home as a dangerous place, the reality is that an injury occurs in a home on average every three minutes (ACC). In times of financial stress, many home owners undertake ill-prepared or dangerous DIY or maintenance activities – often because they simply cannot afford to pay professionals to do the work for them.

After a winter, gutters are full to overflowing, paths are slippery and moss-laden, leaks may have developed in your roof, wooden decks become a skating rink, tree limbs (or entire trees) have been damaged and in some cases they may threaten the safety of your home and occupants.

Fixing many of these problems requires special skills or equipment and yet we continue to tackle them ourselves because we can't afford or can't find someone to assist us with the tasks.

Ensure that you plan steps that you can take to safely carry out the regular repairs and maintenance requirements for your home – these measures will also assist tradespeople or friends and family members to assist you.

## Fire Safety

Install smoke alarms; have an escape plan for your household; keep your garden hose connected; have an extinguisher handy; don't run electrical cords under mats and rugs; have a secure guard around the heater or fire.

## Security

Set up or join a Neighbourhood Support Group consisting of friends, common interest groups, family groups; make sure doors & windows have good quality, effective catches and locks; install an alarm system, sensor lights and a 'peep-hole' in a front door; trim trees or shrubbery which might 'hide' a burglar's activity. ■



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