



Regulated Industries Complaints Office

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cca.hawaii.gov/rico



AGING IN PLACE

What makes a home accessible? It's the ability to safely enter and move around your home without any obstacles, like narrow doors and steps. These days, more and more people are thinking about these issues. If you're considering making your home more accessible, here are some ideas and things to think about.

Look around. Before you start planning, take a few days to look around your home. Starting at the curb, imagine how a wheelchair, scooter, or walker would get inside. (Don't forget to think about the width of your doorways and how easy it is to operate door handles.) Once inside, how easy would it be to maneuver around? (Wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers need a certain amount of "clear space" in order to turn around.) Spend some serious time looking at the kitchen and bathroom. Don't forget to think about the width of any hallways and how it may affect your ability to maneuver in a narrow hallway into a bedroom or bathroom door.

Splish Splash. There are a lot of new products and materials available today that are designed to make bathrooms safer and more accessible. Non-slip tile and other non-slip flooring products, thermostatic shower and faucet valves that prevent hot water from getting too hot, walk-in bathtubs and walk-in showers are just a few. And, even if your existing bathroom is small, there are still some things you can do...vanity cabinets can be removed to allow wheelchair access to sinks (cover any exposed plumbing to prevent contact with sharp edges and burns from hot water pipes); prefabricated, fiberglass/acrylic roll-in shower floors can replace a standard sized tub; and simply replacing a toilet with one that has a higher profile may give an additional five to seven inches in height that can make standing up easier (grab bars should be installed for balance and support).

What's cooking? There are also a lot of great ideas out there for making kitchens more accessible. For example, having a licensed electrician place electrical outlets and switches on the front of counters or cabinets for easier access; removing the doors from base cabinets to provide access to the sink and work areas; or installing a tilted mirror over the stove area so you can see what's cooking from a seated position. Information also suggests that side-by-side refrigerators are best for the mobility impaired, and sinks with single-lever handles, that control both water temperature and flow rate, are recommended. Small things, like C- or D-shaped drawer handles and rocker style light switches, are also good ideas.

Need a lift? Stair lifts are usually straight but some can be fit for curved staircases. Most mount to the wall, but some models mount to the stairs themselves. If installing a lift outside, be sure to ask if the lift is weatherproof. Most importantly, be sure to have the lift installed by a licensed contractor. Some dealers who sell the units may not be licensed to install, so when purchasing a lift product, be sure to ask who will be doing the installation and if they are licensed to do the work. If you have questions about what kind of contractor to hire, call the Contractor's License Board at (808) 586-2700. To check if a contractor, electrician or plumber is licensed, call RICO at (808) 587-4272.

Where to start. Start by getting as much information as possible. There are a lot of great resources on the internet. Home and new product shows are also great for getting ideas. When you decide on the changes you'd like to make, consider hiring a licensed contractor. And remember, you may need to hire a licensed electrician for any electrical work you need done and a licensed plumber for any plumbing work you may need done.

Some things you can do now:

- Bending over or standing up too quickly can cause dizziness. Consider putting a chair or bench outside so you have a place to sit and remove or put on shoes. (Make the chair a stable one in case people grab onto it, and be sure to keep it out of the way so it doesn't become a tripping hazard.)
- If you need to widen a doorway, some hardware stores sell hinges that allow the door to open and drop back in line with the door frame. This may provide an extra inch or two to the doorway without too much expense.
- Replacing conventional door knobs with lever-style handles may make opening doors easier.

- Remove or replace rugs. Accent rugs (especially those without a non-skid backing) can be tripping hazards, especially in the bathroom.
- Use lights to illuminate pathways after dark. Look for energy saving LED products. Automatic, light-sensor night-lights can automatically turn lights on after dark.
- Install bathtub and shower grab bars to provide support. Bars should have at least a 1½ inch (40 mm) clearance from the wall.
- Use tub transfer seats which allow a person to sit in the tub and take a bath or shower without having to lower themselves to the tub floor.
- Add one or two inches to the height of your toilet by installing a molded plastic seat.
- Add remote switches for lights (like those that go on or off with the clap of hands).

There are lots of good reasons why you should strongly consider hiring a licensed contractor:

- ▶ In order to qualify for a contractor’s license, applicants must demonstrate they have the necessary training and experience to get a contractor’s license.
- ▶ Licensed contractors are required to carry liability insurance and are responsible if a worker is injured on a jobsite.
- ▶ Licensed contractors are able to apply for and obtain building permits.
- ▶ The Contractors Recovery Fund helps to compensate homeowners if something goes wrong with their project and is only available to consumers who have hired a licensed general contractor.

Remember, it’s important to hire the right kind of contractor for your particular job. If you’re only putting in flooring, a specialty flooring contractor may be for you. But if your job includes more than two specialties, (for example, a kitchen remodel), a general contractor will be licensed to do most of the work and can hire licensed subcontractors to take care of any specialty work for which he/she isn’t licensed to do.

Don’t forget, any electrical or plumbing work on your project should be done by licensed electricians and licensed plumbers. Only licensed electricians and plumbers or companies can apply for electrical or plumbing permits.

If you have questions about what kind of a contractor you may want to hire, call the Contractor’s License Board at (808) 586-2700. To check if a contractor, electrician or plumber is licensed, call the Regulated Industries Complaints Office (RICO) at (808) 587-4272.

RESOURCES

The Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA) and RICO offer tools, tips, and services you can use to check out an individual or business. Information is available by calling **(808) 587-4272** or online at **cca.hawaii.gov/business_online**.

For information about filing a complaint or to report unlicensed activity, call RICO’s Consumer Resource Center at **(808) 587-4272** or visit us online at **cca.hawaii.gov/rico**.

To call Oahu-RICO, dial the following toll free numbers: Kauai 274-3141, extension 74272; Maui 984-2400, extension 74272; Big Island 974-4000, extension 74272; Molokai and Lanai 1-800-468-4644, extension 74272, followed by the # sign.

RICO is the enforcement arm for over 45 professional boards, commissions, and programs that are administratively attached to the DCCA. RICO receives complaints, conducts investigations, and prosecutes licensing law violations. RICO also prosecutes unlicensed activity through the issuance of citations and by filing civil lawsuits in the Circuit Courts. RICO works to resolve consumer complaints where appropriate and provides consumer education about various issues relating to licensing and consumer protection. RICO also administers the State Certified Arbitration Program (SCAP) for “lemon” motor vehicle claims.

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