



Professionals

news - May 2011

To Renovate or Built

If you have decided against building a new home this year in favour of renovating the one you have, you are not alone.

The number of new houses built in Australia this year is expected to drop significantly, but renovations are on the rise.

According to the Housing Industry Association (HIA), the voice of Australia's residential building industry, new home construction got off to a bad start for the year and the situation is expected to continue that way.

HIA chief economist, Dr Harley Dale said housing starts were forecast to fall by 15% to 143,430 in 2011.

"The fate of residential building in 2011 has been all but sealed by higher interest rates, continuing tight credit conditions, and a complete lack of progress on policy reform to reduce excessive new housing costs," Dr Harley said.

"However, the renovations side of the housing coin looks in relatively healthy shape and hit nearly \$31 billion worth of work last year, the highest level in four years.

"We expect activity in the renovations sector to hold largely steady this financial year, which would be a good outcome.

"Growth of 2% is forecast in 2011/12 and 5% in 2012/13, taking renovations activity to a worth of over \$33 billion, close to a record high."

The HIA has been concerned for some time about the nationwide shortage of skilled workers in the housing industry.

A report late last year showed a shortage of skilled tradespeople in eight out of 13 trades.

In a pre-budget submission to the Federal Government earlier this year, HIA highlighted shortages across building and construction trades.

It stressed an urgent need for industry mentoring programs, targeted incentives for employers to take on apprentices and promoting participation of older workers.

HIA Economist, Matthew King said Australia needed a simultaneous consideration of domestic investment in apprentices and training, and a targeted skilled migration program.



Hot Tip:

When selling your property, remember that first impressions count. Make sure that the entry point to your property is as welcoming and enticing as you would want it to be if you were a potential buyer. Ensure that the exterior walls are cleaned, gauze doors are dusted and repaired if needed, and plants or garden beds are nicely presented.



Toddler Safe Driveway

On average, one child a month is killed in the driveway of Australian homes.

The driver involved is usually a parent of the child, or a friend of the family.

Research has shown most of the accidents occur at or near the child's home, where both the parent and the child may have felt the child was safe.

However, child safety bodies believe the driveway is one of the deadliest areas around the home.

Most of the tragedies happen when toddlers wander near a stationary vehicle.

The children are old enough to be mobile, but too small to be easily visible from the driver's seat or in the rear view mirror when close to the vehicle.

As with most accidents, some simple precautions could significantly reduce, if not largely prevent, driveway tragedies.

For a start, the driveway should always be out of bounds to toddlers and small children.

The driveway should be clearly

separated from the child's play area or the rest of the garden or yard, perhaps with a fence.

Householders can make it difficult for children to access the driveway by making sure doors and gates swing shut automatically and by installing childproof locks on them.

Whenever you are moving a car in the driveway, know where your, or any other small children, are.

Make sure they are being supervised by a responsible adult. As every parent knows, children can make quick, unexpected dashes in the wrong direction.

If you are the only adult at home and you need to shift the car, put your child in the back – strapped in securely, of course – just for that short time.

Some new vehicles come with a reversing camera or a sensor which enable the driver to see what is behind the vehicle.

If you do have small children in your home, or a close relative's home it might be worth investing in a reversing sensor. After all, accidents can happen in a split second, with terrible consequences.

Wiring

If you are in the process of buying a house which has been renovated, be certain to check the paperwork to ensure fully qualified tradespeople carried out the electrical work and safety switches are installed.

Some do-it-yourself enthusiasts take the risk of carrying out electrical repairs and upgrades themselves, putting the property at risk of fire.

Archicentre, the building advisory service of the Australian Institute of Architects, said illegal wiring could become a dangerous and expensive liability.

Spokesman David Hallett said an Archicentre survey of more than 100,000 homes across Australia found 30.52% had electrical wiring issues.

Mr Hallett said problems included very old, even bare wiring in older homes and instances of illegal wiring where previous owners had installed their own power points and wiring systems.

"Illegal wiring is a threat to the inhabitants, visitors and tradespeople asked to work on the property," Mr Hallett said.

"People doing this wiring or allowing it to be done are gambling with lives, leaving themselves open to injury from electrocution or major legal problems".

Mr Hallett said a problem in older homes was wiring which had deteriorated and not been replaced.

Mr Hallett said roof spaces could cause major problems, especially if faulty wiring came into contact with combustible materials, fuelling a fire above the smoke alarm which could leave residents unaware of the fire above their heads until it was well advanced.

The Federal Government's \$2.45 billion Home Insulation Scheme highlighted the problems of faulty insulation installation where house fires may have been caused through the disturbance of electrical wiring and protective heat shields, Mr Hallett said.

The program highlighted the problem of homes without safety switches which were required by law in new and renovated homes to minimize the risk of electrocution.

"An electrical safety switch monitors the flow of electricity through a circuit," he said.

"It detects a problem as soon as the current leaves the circuit, and turns the power off within 0.03 of a second. This is quick enough to help save your life and prevent costly fires or damage to your property."



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