

Appendix B - Modifying Your Home

The following is a guide to address recommended modifications that can promote a safe and healthy environment for you and your family. Take time to fill out the Home Safety Checklist at the end of this section to better prepare for expected and unexpected changes.

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There are many common problems that arise in rural homes. Your house may have a lack of railings for holding onto when approaching your house. There may be several potential hazards to the entrance of your house such as a lack of lighting at night, uneven or cracked pavement on the walking path, or an unmarked or raised threshold.

Solutions for Problem Areas

Solutions for these areas may be fixed by calling a local general contractor or having a family member, or yourself fix problem areas.

- Addition of at least one side of railing is recommended for climbing stairs to enter the house. (Two is better.)
- An outdoor sensor light can be installed to automatically turn on when motion is detected.
- Contact a general contractor to assess uneven or cracked pavement and determine if it needs to be repaired or replaced. If it is a sidewalk or driveway end, you may be eligible for local government assistance.
- For unmarked or raised thresholds, you can use bright or neon paint colors or contrasting tape on the edge of thresholds to increase awareness of change of height.

Benefits for Adapting your House

There are several benefits for adapting or modifying your house to become more accessible. One of the main benefits is the ability to reduce injuries and falls within the house. Other benefits for modifying your home are increased independence within the house, safety, comfort, and convenience. Also, with proper setup of the home you can promote energy conservation.

One in three aging adults 65 and older will fall each year. Fortunately, you can take steps to decrease the risks.

Many homes on the farm or ranch were built prior to 1990, before the current, more standardized building codes. Those homes were not built for wheelchair use, walker access, and older adults. For these homes, home modification may be necessary.

Most commonly needed modifications are:

- Bathroom grab bars near the toilet and in the shower or the tub.
- Railings on both sides of a stairway.
- Widening of door frames for greater access to common areas such as bathrooms, kitchens, and bedrooms.
- Repair and removal of structural barriers such as inadequate flooring, uneven transitions between flooring surface, and other non-structural barriers such as furniture.



Structural issues and barriers to meeting accessibility guidelines are:

- Limited floor space.
- Limited wall space for installing grab bars.
- Wall studs that are generally 16 inches on center.
- Unknown barriers within walls.
- Financial limitations.

Common devices and features for consideration are:

- Textured versus smooth grab bars.
- One stair railing versus two stair railings.
- Height of grab bars in comparison to the user.
- Minimum width of door frames for walker and wheelchair access.

Approach/Entrance

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There may be several potential hazards to the entrance of your house.

- Your house has no lighting for approach to the house.
- Steps are unsafe because they are steep, cracked, or chipped away.
- There is no parking space close to the entrance to the house.

Solutions for Problem Areas

Solutions for these areas may be fixed by calling a local general contractor, family member, or you may also be able to fix some of these issues.

- Install lever door knobs.
- Replace high steps or steps in poor condition with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) conforming steps.
- Improve exterior lighting.
- Contact a local contractor to get an estimate on the cost of a pavement driveway close to the entrance of the house. A five-foot aisle on each side of the car space is recommended.
- If cost is a limiting factor, see if a local 4-H or FFA chapter could do simple solutions as a service project.

Layout and Flooring

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There may be several potential hazards in the layout and flooring of your house.

- Cluttered walking paths around your house.
- Poor lighting.
- Outlets and light switches are difficult to reach or are not in convenient places.

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Solutions for Problem Areas

- Make sure floor surfaces are dry.
- Have carpet re-stretched to eliminate bumps or wrinkles.
- Use rug pads or carpet tape to secure rugs and carpets.
- Eliminate clutter on floors by removing or reorganizing items in your house.
- You can replace old light bulbs with high wattage/low energy light bulbs to produce more light in your house. (Having lights in each room and high traffic areas are important for safe travel in and around your house.)
- Contact a local electrician to examine your layout of outlets and light switches and ask for an estimate on how much it would cost to move them or add more outlets or light switches.

Bathroom

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There may be several potential hazards in the bathroom. You may have:

- A tub with a slippery bottom.
- A lack of grab bars near tub, shower, or toilet area.
- A lack of bath chair in tub or shower.
- Unsafe bath rugs near tub, shower, sink, or toilet.

Solutions for Problem Areas

- Adding a rubber bath mat or adhesive non-skid decals can increase grip in tubs and showers.
- Adding grab bars will help assist in moving from seated positions in the bathroom areas and while standing or moving around the bathroom.
- You can buy a bath chair or bench from your local hardware store. Do not use a regular household chair due to the chair legs' ability to slip on the bathtub surface.
- Remove clutter from rails and floors.
- Buy clothes basket or plastic containers for storage.

Stairs

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There may be several potential hazards with the stairs in your house. These could be:

- A lack of railings on either side of the stairs.
- Steps too steep for climbing.
- Steps without tread/carpet.
- Poor lighting on staircase.

Solutions for Problem Areas

- Have a minimum of one railing the length of the staircase. Railings on each side are preferred.
- Hold on to railings for stability.



- Have other family members carry items up and down the stairs.
- Have the lights on when walking up or down the staircase.
- Mark the edge of the steps with bright color strips or contrasting tape to increase awareness of change of height.
- Increase the light bulb wattage/energy saving bulbs or add more lighting to the staircase area.

Bedroom

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There may be several potential hazards within the bedroom of your house:

- Electrical cords running across the room.
- Closet rods and shelves not within reach.
- Unsafe carpet: uneven, torn, or ripped.
- Height of bed is too high or low.

Solutions for Problem Areas

- Run electrical extension cords behind furniture. The cords' rating should match the appliance or fixture they are powering.
- Rehang rods or move shelves lower so they are within reach.
- Have the carpet restretched to eliminate bumps or wrinkles.
- Use rug pads or carpet tape to secure down rugs and carpets.

- Bed risers can be purchased at your local shopping center to raise bed 2-12 inches. If the bed is too high, you can remove the bed frame or buy a low profile mattress.

Kitchen

Common Problems in a Rural Home

There may be several potential hazards within the kitchen:

- Your kitchen does not have enough space for moving around.
- You have to use a stool or chair to reach things out of the cupboard.
- Stove/oven controls are hard to turn and to read.
- There is no place to sit while working in the kitchen.

Solutions for Problem Areas

- Remove extra furniture or clutter that is not used often in the kitchen. Push furniture against the wall to create more room.
- Move items that you use often to a lower shelf. You can purchase sturdy three-step stepladder to use in the kitchen.
- You can buy adapter to assist in the turning of knobs. Stick bright tape at the two most used settings.
- You can purchase a stool to have for sitting in the kitchen.

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Home Safety Checklist

Complete the following checklist to see if your home would be considered safe.

- Do you have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor of your house?
- Does your home have warning detectors that caution you through audio and visual signals?
- Do you have a home emergency exit plan?
- Are there two options for exiting your home safely?
- Are emergency numbers listed next to a phone?
- Do you know how to turn off the electricity and gas in an emergency?
- Is there a fire extinguisher placed at each level of the house?
- Is there a protective screen in front of fireplaces?
- Do your interior doors have safety release locks?
- Are your walls painted with lead-free paint?
- Do you have “motion detector” lights installed on the exterior of your house?
- Are your walkways at least 36-inches wide?
- Do your stairways have handrails on both sides while stairs are of the same height and tread depth (6-inch rise with a 10-inch run) with visible textured material attached to distinguish steps along with light switches stationed at each end of the staircase?
- Are your doors 36-inches wide with a 34-inch clearing when doors are completely open?
- Do your doorways or entryways have no more than one half-inch change in surface level?
- Do your doors have lever-style handles (no round knobs)?
- Do your doors have less than a 5-pound maximum force to open?
- Does each room of your home have a space of 5 feet by 5 feet so that you can turn around?



- ___ Does your home have scatter rugs or cords running throughout? (It shouldn't).
- ___ Does your shower have a minimum space of 40 by 40 inches?
- ___ Does your bathtub or shower have non-slip grips?
- ___ Do you have grab bars accessible for use by the shower/tub and toilet?
- ___ Does your toilet sit 17-19 inches above floor level with 5 feet of clearance surrounding it?
- ___ Are beds easy to get in and out of with a walking space surrounding them (36-inches wide)?
- ___ Do your kitchen countertops have rounded corners (not sharp edges), and are they continuous between your refrigerator and sink for easy transport of objects?
- ___ Does your kitchen have sufficient lighting over work spaces?
- ___ Is your refrigerator a side-by-side for easy access to items?
- ___ Is your living room and/or dining room on one continuous level?
- ___ Does your laundry room have a front-loader washer with a dryer raised on platforms?
- ___ Do you have a bathroom located on the main level of your home?
- ___ Are your electrical outlets placed 18 to 24 inches above the floor?
- ___ Is the circuit breaker panel on the main level with easy access?
- ___ Are all light switches touch or rocker style (not flip switches)?
- ___ Are all faucets lever-handled and adapted to be anti-scalding?

Now What?

Review your responses and make a list of problems. Make a plan to prioritize, budget expenditures, and hire someone to carry out the work or DIY over the next several weeks or months. More information on funding home modifications for safety and aging in place can be found in Section 3 of Ag4 Life.