CITY OF LINCOLN
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THINKING OF CUTTING YOUR CEILING? CONSULT YOUR BUILDING DEPARTMENT FIRST!

Before you cut a hole in the garage ceiling to gain access to the attic area under the roof for storage or before you cut through your hall ceiling to add a whole house fan, please read the following.

Statistics show that most house fires start in the garage (kitchen and bedroom run second and third) and spread to the rest of the house. Certain Building Codes were instituted because of this, such as gas water heaters in the garage must be elevated 18" (to prevent the pilot light from igniting paint and fuel fumes that are heavier than air but very combustible). Another code says that the garage must be separated from the living area by a one hour fire wall. That is why you see newer houses with the garage dry-walled on the ceilings and on the wall connecting to the house.

When a homeowner looking for more storage space cuts through the garage ceiling and installs an "attic" access panel, they are violating the fire wall. They have in effect nullified the protection of the sheetrock and a fire starting in the garage can quickly spread to the rest of the house.

When a homeowner cuts some of the bottom chords of the ceiling trusses to make room for the access panel or a whole house fan they have first of all invalidated the warranty on the trusses, and second they have weakened the truss itself. Will the roof come down? Probably not, but it will sag, and so will the ceiling. Because of the way trusses are constructed, on a tension and compression design, boxing in the opening your cut will not help. When you cut the chord, you released the tension that it works on.

When you throw a piece of plywood on the trusses and load it with all that stuff you couldn't find a place for, you are using the trusses in way they were not designed for. Trusses generally are designed for a 20 lb live load. That means they are designed to withstand a worker walking across the trusses as they install them. They are not designed for a dead load--that is for weight remaining on them. The extra weight will weaken the truss, and possibly cause noticeable sags. Will they come down? It would depend on how much weight was added to them.

When you are planning a project, we encourage you to give the Lincoln Building Department a call first to see if what you are planning will be feasible and to obtain any necessary permits.

Questions? Call (916) 434-2470.