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Accessible Rural Housing Options: Mobile Homes and Manufactured Housing

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RURALFACTS

Accessible Rural Housing Options: *Mobile Homes and Manufactured Housing*

- From 1980 to 1990 mobile homes and manufactured housing increased from 10.4 percent to 15.9 percent of rural housing stock.
- Since 1980, more than 3,375,000 manufactured homes have been built, representing 19.3 percent of all new housing starts and 28.3 percent of all new single family homes sold. (Manufactured Housing Institute, 1994)
- Average price for a new single-section manufactured home: \$21,900; for a multi-section manufactured home: \$39,600 (US Department of Commerce)
- In 1994, 98 corporations manufactured 303,932 manufactured housing units in 269 plants nationwide. (National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards)
- Mobile home manufacturers surveyed report that as many as one in 10 buyers request features that improve accessibility. (Bernier, Rural Institute on Disabilities, 1994)
- Almost half the residents of manufactured housing are age 50 or older. (American Association of Retired Persons, 1994)
- In a survey of adults with disabilities living in rural areas, 12 percent of respondents said they live in mobile homes. (Bernier, Rural Institute on Disabilities, 1994)
- Of 29 mobile home residents with disabilities interviewed, 19 purchased their home because of a mobility impairment or multiple chemical sensitivity. (Bernier, Rural Institute on Disabilities, 1994)

Making a mobile home accessible

For affordable housing, it's hard to beat a used mobile home. In rural areas, liveable units that need some repair are sometimes available for \$1,000 or less. Rural zoning is often more friendly to mobile homes than zoning in urban areas. But many mobile homes--especially older models--have access problems: narrow hallways, small, poorly designed bathrooms, narrow doorways and hard-to-use kitchens. In his survey of mobile home residents with disabilities, the Institute's Brad Bernier talked to several enterprising folks who bought inexpensive used mobile homes and, with the help of friends and family, made the access modifications they needed to create a home that they could afford. *Here are some tips on modifying mobile homes:*

To widen doorways, an inexpensive solution is to cut a wider opening in the wall and replace the door, if necessary, with a curtain; another option is to replace standard hinges with offset hinges that allow the door to swing clear of the opening; for an exterior door or a remodel with a finished look, a new door and frame can be installed.

To enlarge rooms or widen hallways, interior walls can often be moved or eliminated without creating structural problems. Finish work can be adapted to suit a budget.

The need to move electrical outlets and switches can be reduced or eliminated using inexpensive plug-and-play remote control modules, available from Radio Shack and other sources.

Some work will require expert help. Replacing or rearranging plumbing, electrical and heating systems, for example, can create health and fire hazards if improperly done. Use licensed professionals for those jobs.

And speaking of fire hazards, many older mobile homes are made of highly flammable materials, so it's wise to add outside doors to the bedrooms of individuals with mobility impairments to speed emergency exits.

Older mobile homes are also a good option for people with multiple chemical sensitivity: their low cost makes it financially feasible to completely remove the interior walls, flooring and paneling, and replace the old materials with inert products like stainless steel and glass that do not sicken the residents.

One last caveat on older mobile homes: If a resident will use a power chair or other heavy equipment, have the floor structure checked to be sure it will support the combined weight of the individual and the devices.

Manufactured Housing Resources

Three publications on accessible manufactured housing by Rural Institute on Disabilities researcher Brad Bernier will be available in Spring 1995: a consumer guide for home buyers, a monograph on lending and zoning policies affecting the purchase and placement of accessible manufactured housing and a monograph on how increasing the availability of accessible manufactured housing can benefit the industry and people with disabilities. Contact the Institute.

"Mobile Homes, Alternative Housing for the Handicapped," HUD-000059, \$10 + \$3.50 S&H from:

HUD User, PO Box 6091, Rockville, MD, 20850. 800-245-2691

Consulting on manufactured housing issues and many publications on accessible housing are available from:

The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State Univ., Box 8613, Raleigh, NC 27695-8613. 915-515-3082 800-647-6777.

Accessible Mobile Home Manufacturers

Keiser Homes
PO Box 470
Oxford, ME 04270
207-539-8884

Peachtree Housing
795 Georgia Hwy. 33 S.
Moultrie, GA 31768
912-985-6200

Hi-Tech Homes
19319 County Rd. #8
Bristol, IN 46507
219-848-5593

Excel Housing, Inc.
RD #2, Box 638
Liverpool, PA 17045
717-444-3395

Industry Information:

The Manufactured Housing Institute
1745 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
703-413-6620

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