

Advantage Companies

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By Dan Perrin, Certified Building inspector

Dear Dan,

My Realtor strongly recommends having a home inspection. She warned me about major building defects, but this sounds kind of sensational. What I'd like is a list of the most common problems. What should I expect a home inspector to find? Steve

Dear Steve,

Construction defects and safety violations are surprisingly common, but the majority of home inspection findings tend to be routine in nature. Some, in fact, rear their unsightly heads as often as the sun rises; not just in older homes, but often in brand new ones, even before the smell of new paint has waned. The following, therefore, is a list of common defects likely to appear in a typical home inspection report:

1. Roofing defects, caused by aging or improper installation are likely to be found on most buildings. This does not mean that most roofs need replacement, but that many are in need of maintenance and repair.
2. Ceiling stains in many homes indicate past or current leaks. The challenge is to determine if the leak was repaired or will recur during the next rain. Discovery is not always possible.
3. Faulty ground drainage often causes water intrusion beneath buildings. Such problems can be pervasive, difficult to resolve, and may cause damage to building components.
4. Electrical safety violations, either few or many, are to be found in the majority of homes. Examples are ungrounded outlets, lack of shock protection, amateur wiring "improvements," and conditions too numerous to name.
5. Rotted wood is common where components remain wet for long periods. Exterior locations are trim, eaves, and decks. Problems also occur at walls and floors in bathrooms.
6. Code violations are common where additions and alterations are built without permits. Sellers often boast that, "We added the garage without a permit, but it was all done to code." This is a red flag to most home inspectors.
7. Fireplaces and chimneys are often unsafe. Common causes are amateur installation of hardware and fixtures, exterior rust damage, or simple failure to call a chimney sweep.
8. Water heaters are seldom in total compliance with code requirements. Violations include inadequate strapping, substandard overflow piping, unsafe flue conditions, and faulty gas lines.

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9. Gas furnaces often harbor defects. These range from dirty filters to faulty combustion; from poor airflow to exhaust hazards; from noisy operation to inadequate fire clearance. Given the potential for major consequences, annual servicing by the gas company is recommended.

10. Faulty firewalls are common in garages. Violations include, holes, unprotected attic accesses, doors not fire rated, drywall that is too thin, and exposed wood framing.

11. Minor plumbing defects are commonly found, including loose toilets, dripping faucets, slow drains, leaking drains, hot water at the right faucet, and so on.

12. Failed seals are routinely found at dual pane windows, resulting in fogging. This is most common with windows manufacturer during the 1980's.

An unabridged list of likely home inspection findings would probably fill a few volumes subject to addenda on a routine basis. For home buyers, this underscores the importance of a thorough evaluation prior to closing escrow.