

Advantage Companies

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Dear Dan,

For the first time in 25 years, I'm buying a home. A lot has changed since the 1970's, including a home inspection. The last time I bought a house, no one ever heard of home inspection. Now my Realtor insists that I have one. Can you please explain what these inspections are all about? Martha W.

Dear Martha,

A home inspection is a thorough and systematic evaluation of the condition of a residential property. It is a complete physical exam of the general integrity, functionality, and overall safety of a home and its various components. The purpose of this process is to ensure that home buyers know exactly what is being purchased, prior to completing the transaction.

In the course of a home inspection, the inspector will evaluate the foundation, framing, roofing, site drainage, attic, plumbing, heating, electrical system, fireplaces, chimneys, pavement, fences, stairs, decks, patios, doors, windows, walls, ceilings, floors, built-in appliances, and numerous other fixtures and components. Whew!

In all homes, even brand new ones, some building defects will inevitably be discovered during the inspection. All pertinent findings will be detailed in a written report for the buyer's reference and review, and the inspector will make a complete verbal presentation of these conditions for those who attend the inspection.

This information enables a home buyer to make educated decisions about a home purchase: whether to complete the transaction, whether to ask the seller to make repairs, whether to buy the property as is. Buyers can also determine how much repair and renovation will be needed after taking possession, which problems are of major concern, which ones are minor, and what conditions compromise the safety of the premises

A thorough inspection enables a home buyer to avoid costly surprises after the close of escrow. It is an indispensable component of a well-planned purchase.

Dear Dan,

My home is built on a concrete slab, and the water heater is located in the hall closet. Now that I'm selling the property, the buyer's home inspector has recommended a metal pan under the water heater to prevent damage in the event of a leak. An overflow pan seems unnecessary to me because a pan can only hold about two gallons of water. If a serious leak occurs, the pan will simply overflow, causing damage to the interior of the house. What do you recommend in this situation? Fred S.

Dear Fred,

Overflow pans for water heaters (commonly known as "smitty" pans) are advisable but are not required by code. Therefore, the home inspector's recommendation is a good idea, but it does not obligate you in any way. Even if a pan were required, installation in your home may not be practical.

To be effective, a smitty pan should be connected to a 3/4" pipe providing drainage to the outside of the building. In your home, drainage to the exterior may not be possible, due to the concrete slab and the location of the water heater. If the buyers are convinced of the need for a pan, perhaps they should try installing one after the close of escrow.

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