

Preparing for a buyer's home inspection



The perfect home simply doesn't exist. Why? Well, in a brand new home, the contractor often is not aware of shortcuts taken by his subcontractors, and government building and code inspectors do not have the time or the budget to inspect everything in every home, so most government inspectors simply do a spot-check of homes in new subdivisions. A home that has been lived in usually has damage that occurred from simply living in it, or additions or remodeling that weren't permitted. That's why buyers need a professional home inspection.

The purpose of a home inspection is to document the overall condition of the property at the time of the inspection and to ensure that its major systems and components (water heater, heating and cooling, plumbing, electrical, etc.) are installed properly and working properly.

The home inspection is not a warranty since the home inspector is only there for a couple of hours and never saw the home or its systems being built, so he has no idea about any quality control processes. While some items identified during the course of a home inspection might seem like minor items individually, collectively they could add up to major headaches involving both time and money. If sellers know what to look for, they can resolve many minor items before the buyer's home inspection.

Below is my "check" list of items often found during the course of a home inspection. Completing repairs before the buyer's home inspection helps ensure that escrow progresses more smoothly. If you have a pre-listing inspection, some, but not all, of these concerns might show up in that inspection report. A pre-listing inspection can be shorter than a standard buyer's inspection simply because descriptions of the house you've been living in might be omitted, and noting things like a hole in a screen window, or a small crack in a window corner, or a loose door hinge are not major items, all things considered, but collectively they can cause a prospective buyer to say, "No, thanks. Too many problems."

OUTSIDE

- Check that doorbells work.
- Check for missing roof shingles.
- Check for loose/damaged/clogged gutters/downspouts.
- Check attic ventilation and condition of vent screens.
- Check to see if there is standing water, especially near the foundation, after irrigation or rainfall.
- Check for cracks in foundation walls.
- Check structure (including attic and foundation crawl space) for pests (termites, wasps, spiders, nests, etc.).
- Check exterior weatherproofing (stain, paint, etc.).
- Check for any wood in direct contact with soil, including fences and gates.
- Check for loose wiring (electric, cable, phone) and poor wire terminations.
- Check for holes and damage to siding, doors, windows, and trim so that structure is weatherproof.
- Check that any exterior outlets are weatherproofed and not in permanent use for any landscape lighting.
- Check condition of landscape components (retaining walls, landscaper timbers, etc.).
- Check for overgrown vegetation, especially in walkways; growing on siding, roof, chimney, fences, or in gutters; or too close to utility lines.
- Check for trip hazards in walkways, driveways, and stairways (deterioration, vegetation, etc.)
- Check condition of fences or gates (leaning, damaged).
- Check for loose, missing, or rusted guardrails and handrails at stairways, decks, balconies, and porches.
- Check that landscape lighting/irrigation systems work, and that sprinklers don't spray on fences or buildings.
- Check condition of pool and spa, and related equipment and utilities.
- Check that ponds, fountains, and waterfalls, and related utilities, work properly and are protected from children.

INSIDE

- Check condition of towel holders and tissue holders.
- Check condition of bathtubs, showers, and shower doors, and replace old shower curtains.
- Check that safety seal shows on glass doors and floor-to-ceiling windows.
- Check that carbon monoxide alarms work.
- Check that smoke alarms work, and that they are present on each floor of multi-story houses.
- Check for loose kitchen and bathroom countertops.
- Check ease of operation for doors (including closet doors and cabinet doors), drawers, and windows, including windows nailed or painted shut.
- Check for missing, loose, or damaged hardware on doors (including closet doors and cabinet doors), drawers (stops and guides), and windows.
- Check that latches/locks work on doors (including closet doors and cabinet doors), drawers, and windows.
- Check for loose glass panes in windows and doors, as well as glass with holes or cracks in them.
- Check for damage to screen windows.
- Remove excessive storage (closets, attic, garage).
- Check for damage to walls and ceilings that need to be patched and painted.
- Check for moisture stains on ceilings and walls; around doors and windows; near sinks, toilets, bathtubs, and showers; and near the dishwasher.
- Check for loose, missing, or damaged guardrails and handrails in stairways.
- Check for loose, broken or missing baseboards and door and window moldings.
- Check for cracked tiles or deteriorated grouting in kitchen and bathrooms.
- Check that kitchen appliances work.
- Check that an anti-tip device is installed on the range.

PLUMBING

- Check that seismic straps are on the water heater.
- Check that stoppers work in bathtubs and sinks.
- Check for clogged drains.
- Check that toilet seat bolts and screws are tight.
- Check that faucets don't drip or leak around the base.
- Check stop action on faucet handles.
- Check condition of caulk/grout in bathtubs/showers.
- Check insulation on water pipes in attic and foundation crawl space.
- Check for safe and easy access to any water shutoff valves (street curb, exterior, water heater, sinks, toilets, washer, etc.).
- Check for safe and easy access to any gas shutoff valves (meter, furnace, water heater, etc.).
- Check for loose toilets and loose toilet tanks.



ELECTRICAL

- Check for safe and easy access to electric panels and main circuit breaker.
- Check that ceiling fans work on all speeds.
- Check for burned out light bulbs, including ceiling fans.
- Check for damaged or loose outlets and light switches, including covers for outlets and switches.
- Check that outlets work.
- Remove extension cords and outlet multipliers.
- Check for unplugged appliances, and unplug anything that is unnecessary to facilitate outlet testing by the buyer's home inspector.
- Check for outdated two-prong outlets and upgrade them to three-prong outlets.
- Check for properly working GFCI outlets in kitchen, bathrooms, garage, and exterior.
- Check that exhaust fans work in kitchen, bathrooms, and laundry area.
- Check that any electrical junction boxes have covers.



MISCELLANEOUS

- Check that filters are clean (heating and cooling, kitchen range hood, bathroom exhaust fans, etc.)
- Check that dogs or cats are secured or vacationing for a few hours with a family member or friend.
- Check that other pets (birds, snakes, rodents, etc.) are appropriately caged.
- Certain items should be inspected annually due to their inherently dangerous nature. These include gas-using appliances, pool and spa equipment and utilities, roof, and the fireplace and chimney. If they have not been inspected within the last 12 months, having it done now can make escrow go more smoothly.
- Check that the fireplace damper opens/closes easily.
- Check for soot, cobwebs, and wildlife in the fireplace and lower areas of the chimney.
- The Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) recommends that the fireplace and chimney undergo a Level II inspection any time real estate ownership is transferred, and I recommend having that done prior to the buyer's inspection.
- Check for manufacturer installation instructions, operating instructions, or user guides that you can provide to the buyer, especially for kitchen appliances; heating and cooling system; water heater; security, irrigation, fire suppression, central cleaning, and water modification systems; water well; and septic system.
- Many home inspectors exclude inspection and testing of some specialized systems, such as security and irrigation systems. Once you get the buyer's inspection report, note what the inspector did and did not do or could and could not do. Offer to meet with the buyer to demonstrate how those systems are operated and maintained, and provide the contact information for any companies that regularly service the systems.
- Check for receipts and warranty papers for any work done on the property, particularly for inspections and work done to prepare the property for sale.
- Contact the NACHI inspector listed below for a pre-listing inspection to determine major defects. Identifying them now can make escrow go more smoothly.



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