

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A HOME INSPECTION & HINTS TO MARKET YOUR HOME

We've assembled these guidelines as suggestions and helpful hints for your convenience. They are not meant to be all encompassing or even a complete list of every possible scenario, only general guidelines.

While it may not be politically correct to say this, it is true- Women are the initial decision makers when a couple is buying a home. If she doesn't like your home, guess what- their not buying it! That being said, the single most effective thing you can do is to make sure your home is clean, organized and cosmetically appealing. Debris, trash, dishes, clothes, etc. should be cleaned up and put away. While showing your home, have something baking. Nothing says home like the smell of fresh baked bread or cookies!

Often, home sellers are unaware of defects or situations that exist in their home. After all, it's always been that way or you've never noticed it before. Every home has deficiencies as well as positive attributes. Don't be discouraged when items are identified as defective or in need of repair. *REMEMBER:* There is no such thing as a perfect home!

If you're going to have an inspection:

- Furniture, boxes, etc. should be pulled out, put away or arranged to allow access to outlets, switches, windows, doors, plumbing and HVAC systems.
- Insure that all utilities will be on during the inspection and that you have enough gas to complete the inspection (if you have gas appliances).
- Debris, trash, dishes, clothes, etc. should be cleaned up and put away.

NEVER attempt to perform any repair that you're not **COMPLETELY** comfortable with, especially when it comes to electrical or other safety issues such as roof repairs (height- danger of falling). Let's break down each section individually for your convenience.

LANDSCAPING

- Insure that your yard is clean and free of trash and debris. It would be wise to have the yard mown but certainly not necessary.
- Bushes and trees should be trimmed away from the home. Including but not limited to: off of the roof and away from the eaves.
- All holes or run offs should be filled.

REMEMBER: The first impression is usually a lasting impression!

EXTERIOR

- Insure all exterior hose bibs are operating and do not leak.
- Insure all exterior electrical outlets are working.
 - If you have GFCI's (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter), please insure they trip properly. You can buy a cheap tester at the hardware store that has a GFCI tripping button for around \$10-\$15.
 - Insure they are secure in their mountings.
 - Exterior outlets should have weather covers.
- Insure all exterior lighting is working properly.
- Do not use extension cords or their wires as permanent wiring.

- Insure that your wall cladding (vinyl, brick, wood, stucco) is secure.
 - Vinyl panels will slide out of place and simply needs to be pushed or pulled back into place.
 - Brick will often have stress or settling cracks that looks a lot worse than it really is. Re-parging can be time consuming but may be worth your time and effort.
 - Wood siding can be loose and should be re-secured. Wood rot is a common problem with wood siding. Although the rot is still present, it can be made to look a lot better with a little paint
- Insure all window screens are in place and not damaged. If they are stored, leave a note as to their location.
- Older wood frame windows may need to be re-caulked and painted.
- Garage doors are often a safety write up if the auto reverse does not work as designed.
 - Ideally, laser “eyes” should be installed to prevent injury to small children or animals. They should cause the garage door to stop and reverse suddenly when the light path is broken.
 - While standing next to the garage door but not breaking the laser path, have someone close the garage door. At about hip level, try to stop the door with a little resistance. It should auto reverse as well. Don’t use He-Man strength to stop it! Let it go, as you may inadvertently damage the door if you use too much force. If the door did not auto reverse, use the owners manual that came with the door or other resources to adjust the resistance.

REMEMBER: A little paint goes a long way towards the appeal of the home. Home buyers often make mental checklists as to how much they have to do to make the home livable in their eyes.

ROOFING

When performing any roof repairs- **SAFETY FIRST!** If you do not have a safe way to perform these actions, **DO NOT ATTEMPT!** Call a repairman/handyman.

- Insure your roof is free of debris.
- Replace any missing or loose shingles.
- Often, nails will start to “back out” leaving a bulge. Without damaging the shingles, simple lift up the shingle and re-nail. During cold months, they may not lay back down for awhile. Just let the buyers know that you performed these repairs. A little communication goes a long way!
- Gutters
 - Insure they are clean and free of debris; securely mounted; and are not leaking at the seams.
 - Insure your downspouts and discharge angles are securely mounted and in place.
 - A common write up is that the gutters discharge too close to the house. Ideally, they should discharge at least five feet from the home. This is not always practical, but if you have a basement or a wet crawlspace, you should seriously consider this. At a minimum, splash blocks should be installed.
- Chimneys:
 - Insure they have rain caps and screens. Verify that they are free of cresol buildup. Note: If there hasn’t been a rain cap or screen, it may be full of debris just above the smoke shelf and not noticeable from the interior of the home.
 - Masonry chimneys can have loose mortar between the bricks. Re-parging may be necessary.
 - Make a note of the last time the chimney was cleaned and inspected.
- Insure all miscellaneous roof mounted items are secured and not overly damaged.
- Trim tree limbs away from the eaves. Any over hanging tree limbs should also be trimmed as they shade the roof, allow for the growth of mildew/lichen.

STRUCTURE/FOUNDATION

- If you notice minor cracking in the foundation, don't panic, this is normal. Most foundations experience some minor cracking. However, if you notice a gap of 1/8" or more, you may want to consider consulting a structural engineering company to perform repairs. If repairs are necessary, make sure you keep a record of the repairs for future buyers.
- Block foundations may experience settling as well. Re-parging between the blocks will help with the cosmetic appearance.
- In the attic check for:
 - Cracked rafters
 - Spliced wiring, missing CVR cover plates, etc.
- In the crawl space check for:

NOTE: If you smell gas or start to get dizzy: **GET OUT & STAY OUT!** Call a professional to investigate.

- Cracked joists
- Damaged sub-flooring
- Trash, debris, falling insulation.
- Water or gas leaks.
- Standing water.

REMEMBER: Honesty is ALWAYS the best policy! If you know something is seriously wrong with your home, get it repaired and/or let the future buyers know about it. List it on the disclosure form. It will be found out eventually and guess who their going to come after when it is discovered. By then, the problem will be MUCH worse!

ELECTRICAL

When performing any electrical repairs- **SAFETY FIRST!** If you have any doubts where safety is concerned or if you do not have a safe way to perform these actions, **DO NOT ATTEMPT IT!** Call an electrician, it's cheaper than a trip to the ER!

- In the main panel:
 - Check for double taps (two wires using the same breaker). If present, most boxes will accept a breaker that has two individual circuit breakers on the same breaker.
 - If you have aluminum distribution wiring (not in the main as they are often aluminum), insure that **ALL** breakers with aluminum wiring are rated AL or AL/CU and **ALL** outlets/fixtures are rated AL or AL/CU.
 - Check for "cooked" wiring.
 - Is it clean and free of debris?
 - Check to make sure no water is getting into the box.
 - Test all GFCI and AFCI (Arc Fault Circuit Interrupter) in the panel by pushing the test button and then resetting them.
- Check that all lights, permanent appliances and fixtures are working.
- Check all outlets
 - Using a plug in circuit tester, insure that all outlets are grounded and have the correct polarity. It should be noted that grounded outlets did not come into being until the late 50's. If your home is older, you may not have grounded outlets. It's OK! The inspector will just note this in the report. Because you can no longer get the two prong outlets, if the three prong outlets are un-grounded, he will probably note this as well.
 - Check that they are secure in their mountings.
 - Insure all GFCI's function properly as described above in the "Exterior" section.

- While not mandatory for older homes, ideally, GFCI's should be installed near sources of water. i.e. Kitchen, bathroom, exterior, garage, basement, whirlpool, swimming pool, laundry room, etc.
- Recessed lighting fixtures must be IC rated. Meaning that they are rated to be in the ceiling with insulation touching the "can". Often, you can't see the rating on these lights so a home inspector may have a note in their report such as: "Verify recessed light rating. All recess lighting must be rated with an IC rating or have a minimum of 6" clearance around them. Ie. No insulation should be touching the "can"."
- Spliced wiring must be made in CVR junction boxes. Black tape or even electrical nut splices must be made in CVR junction boxes. Often, these splices will be made in the boxes but someone failed to put the cover plate on them. This is still unacceptable.
- Extension cords or their wires should never be used as permanent or exterior wiring- EVER!

HVAC SYSTEMS

- Exterior condensing unit for cooling:
 - Insure the unit is level
 - Insure the unit is not noisy from lack of maintenance. Often, a fin will get bent and simply bending it back will prevent a negative comment.
 - Insure the unit is clean.
 - Check all connections and verify that the freon line has insulation on it and it is not damaged.
- Heating/blower unit:
 - Insure the unit is clean and free of debris.
 - Check unit for excessive noise. If so, have unit serviced.
 - If gas and you notice a "gas" smell- Have the unit serviced.
- Insure the return air filters are clean.
- If accessible, insure all ductwork is secure and properly installed. Some flex duct can work itself free over time.

PLUMBING

- If you have metered water you can easily check if you have a supply leak. It won't help if you have a tiny leak but it will for larger ones. Turn off all water in the home and check the meter to verify that no water is being delivered to the home. On the meter there is usually a small red triangle/needle, this is the supply gauge and this is what you're looking for.
- Fill all sinks and tubs completely, drain and then check for supply and drain leaks (even in the crawl space).
- Verify that hot water comes out using the left knob and cold from the right.
- Check shower head for leakage.
- For the hot water heater:
 - Verify that discharge pipe is present for the TPR (temperature pressure relief valve). It must not reduce in diameter (usually 3/4 inch) and should terminate more than 6 inches but less than 24 from the floor. Alternatively, it can discharge into the crawl space or drain system.
 - For electric heaters:
 - The electrical line should be inside a rigid conduit.
 - For gas heaters:
 - Verify the burner area is free of debris, including rust flakes.
 - If the unit is in a garage, it should be at least 18" off the floor.

INTERIOR

- The door between the garage and the interior of the home should be a fire rated metal or solid wood door.
- All exterior doors should be metal or solid wood doors. Hollow core doors are allowed with a secure storm door.
- All doors and windows should operate freely, close properly and should not be loose in their mountings/frames.
- If you have a fireplace- Gas units should have their pilot lights lit and wood units should be free of ashes.

APPLIANCES

- Verify all permanently installed appliances, kitchen exhaust hood, attic fans, fire alarms, ceiling fans, door bells and those remaining with the property operate as designed with no leaks or safety hazards. If you have a remote for any of these items, please leave it in a noticeable location for the inspector.

In conclusion, if there is anything that we have missed and it is not functional, damaged or in ill repair; it must be listed on the disclosure form for the sake of all parties involved in the transaction.