

Home Inspection and Maintenance Tips

Buying a home will probably be the biggest investment of your lifetime. Before you sign on the dotted line, inspect the house thoroughly. You'll get the information you need to understand the safety issues and maintenance challenges ahead.

What to look for

Determine the extent of deterioration, especially in an older home, how much work you can personally handle, what it will cost to have a professional do the work, and what problems you can live with. Most of all, safety should be your major concern.

Inspection and maintenance tips

We share your concern for a safer house. Our engineering department has assembled a checklist of some items you should look for when inspecting a house. Some points are major and may require consultation with a licensed professional. Others can be taken care of by a person handy with a hammer and nail. Please take a few moments to review these inspection and maintenance tips:

Water damage/Plumbing

- Know where your main water shut-off valve is located and know how to turn the water off.
- Inspect all exposed pipes for leaks.
- Inspect ceilings and walls for water spots, peeling paint, and loose ceiling tiles for hidden leaks.
- Check all faucets for leaks or corrosion.
- If exposed pipes in the basement exist, make sure warm air is circulated throughout. An insulating wrap is a good alternative to treat exposed pipes in unheated areas.
- Bleed all pipes of air.
- Shut off and drain outside water lines before winter in locations subject to freezing.
- Inspect the rubber connecting hoses for dishwashers and washing machines. Replace every 3-5 years or sooner if evidence of rot appears.
- Equip your showers, sinks, and tubs with drain screens to catch the debris, hair, and bits of soap that can cause clogs and back-ups.
- Never flush items like diapers, Q-tips, sanitary napkins, or tampons down a toilet.

Roof

- Have the roof inspected for damage such as lifting of shingles, missing shingles, holes, or wear. Be careful if you need to use a ladder or climb on the roof.
- Flat or hot asphalt roofs should be resealed every three years and professionally checked every ten years.
- Inspect around all roof penetrations (such as flashing and chimneys).
- Inspect and clean all gutters and down spouts.
- Repair damaged gutters and down spouts.
- Have excessive snow or ice build-up removed.

Electrical

- Inspect exposed wiring for wear or damage. Be careful not to touch wiring.
- Inspect the fuse or circuit breaker box for excessive wear or damage. Look for tripped breakers.
- Label with a pen or permanent marker each circuit breaker, noting which location it serves. If you have fuses, also note the amperage.
- Make sure appropriate fuses are being used and all sockets are filled. Do not use pennies or foil to fill the sockets.

- Eliminate all situations where more than one electrical unit is plugged into a single outlet.
- Check electrical units for overheating.
- Major appliances should be plugged into appropriate outlets.
- Do not place floor coverings (e.g., carpeting) over electrical cords.

Heating

- It's tempting to use supplemental heating devices (such as electrical or kerosene heaters) during the winter. If they must be used, keep them away from flammable materials and surfaces that can ignite from prolonged dry heat. Do not store additional fuel in the same room.
- Have furnace/air conditioners professionally cleaned and serviced annually (including the filter).
- Inspect underground fuel tanks.
- Hire a certified chimney sweep to inspect and clean creosote build-up in chimney.

General security

- All exterior doors should have deadbolt locks.
- Do not leave personal property (such as lawnmowers, bikes or grills) unsecured outdoors.
- A heat and smoke detector should be on every floor. It's recommended that detectors be powered by an electrical source with a battery back up.
- Check heat and smoke detector batteries every 3 months. Test heat and smoke detectors when checking the battery.
- A fire extinguisher should be located in the kitchen and near the furnace. Household members should be taught to use a fire extinguisher.
- Motion sensitive outdoor lighting is suggested for added safety and security. If it's affordable, central station burglar and fire alarms are another security alternative.
- Neighborhood watch groups are also suggested.
- Do not hide a spare key outside your premises.

Liability

- Keep walkways, stairs and sidewalk free of obstacles.
- Shovel snow as soon as possible and use salt/sand substances to reduce ice formation.
- Keep stairs, porches, stoops and their rails in good repair.
- Maintain and use outdoor lighting.
- If you own a dog, you should enroll it in Canine Good Citizenship classes offered by the American Kennel Club. The dog does not have to be a pedigree to attend.