

Get The Best Results From Your Home Inspection

by Stephen Ruback, Professional Inspector [TREC License #6030]

A perfect home inspection report [no repairs needed] is a rarity and not to be expected with any property. However, most items needing repair can often be readily fixed, and some fall into the category of buyer's choice as to how important they may really be. On the other hand, serious foundation damage, extensive moisture penetration or insect damage can be a deal breaker.

In any case, your client deserves the most thorough and complete inspection possible. The whole point of the inspection is to avoid immediate serious problems and hidden surprises after the deal is made.

A Little Homework First

There is nothing like a bit of advance warning of troubles ahead. The adventure of life is fraught with the unexpected, but nasty surprises are always low on most people's list of fun experiences.

You can ease the surprise value of potential structural bad news by adding a few items to your lengthy list of observations when examining a home for the first time.

Some of the more obvious red flags:

- cracks in the walls and floors – inside and outside
- moisture discoloration
- patched walls
- doors hard to open or close
- rotted wood
- poor drainage
- extensive surrounding vegetation
- dirt or mulch in contact with walls

While a single red flag item may not result in major problems, several together can offer a fair warning of potential turbulence ahead.

The Inspection – To Be Or Not To Be There

As a typical inspection takes about two hours or more. Your time and attention is probably well spent elsewhere during the inspection itself.

The conclusion of the inspection with the client walk-through is another matter. This is a critical time for you to achieve the most comprehensive understanding of the findings. You have the opportunity to see the conditions first hand, and ask any needed questions for clarification. It also provides you with a unique opportunity to observe the client's responses to the findings as they are revealed.

This knowledge enhances your ability to counsel your client about his realistic options, can provide timely notice of the need to question the seller in more detail about the property history and give more insight into the direction of the more important questions you will need to pursue. In any case, the client should always be present for the walk through.

Before The Inspection

There are several things you, the seller and your client can do to insure the best possible inspection results. Some could be considered normal maintenance and others may seem obvious, but it is surprising how many are overlooked in the excitement of making the deal.

- Take care of basic maintenance items before the inspection. A few examples include broken or missing latches, broken glass, non-working appliances, clogged gutters, broken or missing screens, leaks, and install anti-siphon devices on exterior hose bibs.
- Be sure all utilities are on and all pilot lights lit. If the operating systems cannot be turned on, the inspection cannot take place. This avoids delays, frustration and extra call back or rescheduling charges.
- Replace all burned out light bulbs. Otherwise, you delay the inspection or receive incomplete results.
- Test, and be sure all the smoke alarms have working batteries. This enables the inspector to test them for function, and it takes care of one important item that may easily be forgotten during the chaos of moving in.
- Clear out debris and vegetation around gutters, roof, edges of foundation, and sides of the house. While this may seem obvious for proper showing and overall appearance, it is not always done. Vegetation in contact with any house is a slow but certain destructive situation.
- Make sure all doors and service panels are accessible. Household goods, locks, or any other conditions barring access can mean an incomplete inspection, unnecessary delays and extra cost.
- Secure any pets that may be present. Don't risk inadvertent pet escape, denial of access or possible attack by pets. It is always best if there are no pets present.

Emotional Aspects

If the owner must be present, suggest to them that they be as unobtrusive as possible during the inspection. If the inspector needs their help, he will ask. A homeowner trying to influence the inspection can encourage an inspector to examine the property in even greater critical detail than normal to insure fairness of the report.

If the prospective buyer is present during the inspection, they are best served by watching quietly, or

making their own survey of the property for fit and placement of furniture, as well as an assessment of decorative possibilities. At the end of the inspection, they will have the inspector's full attention for questions and explanations of the findings.

In the end, you are still not likely to have a repair-free inspection report, but you will have eliminated a lot of small items that can obscure more important findings, avoided potential delays and insured the best possible inspection experience.

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