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Home Inspections: Top Ten Problems

Each homebuyer has different ideas of what will constitute the ideal home for them, these notions often based on particular aesthetic preferences. But one thing that unites all potential homebuyers is the desire to find a home that is fundamentally sound—in areas beyond the immediate sweep of the eye—and that will provide a safe, comfortable, and efficient foundation for their life behind a new door.

This is where the services of a home inspector come in. During a home inspection, at least 30 areas of the home are placed under the home inspector's "microscope." We've compiled the ten most common weaknesses uncovered in a typical home inspection. If not addressed, these problems could cost you thousands of dollars in the long-run. So, knowing what to look for, and performing your own thorough pre-inspection, will help you to identify areas for repair or improvement before they grow into costly problems.

1. Damp Basement:

If a mildew odour is present, the inspector will be able to detect it, as this smell is impossible to mask or eliminate. Mildew odour is often the first indication of dampness in the basement. The inspector will also examine the walls, checking for any signs of whitish mineral deposit just above the floor, and will note whether you feel confident enough to store items on the floor.

2. Poorly Installed/ Defective Plumbing:

In older homes, plumbing problems and defects are very common. The inspector will determine whether your home's plumbing is subject to leaking or clogging. Signs of leakage can be visibly detected. The inspector will test water pressure. The inspector will also check for signs of discoloration in the water when a faucet is first turned on. The appearance of dirty water is usually an indication that the pipes are rusted—a water quality problem that should be dealt with immediately.

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3. Older/ Poorly-Functioning Heating and Cooling Systems:

Heating/ cooling systems that are older or haven't been properly maintained can pose serious safety and health problems. An inspector will determine the age of your furnace and, if it is over the average life span of a furnace (15-20 years), will likely suggest you replace it, even if it is still in good condition. If your heating system is a forced air gas system, the heat exchanger will be examined very closely, as any cracks can result in the leak of poisonous carbon monoxide gas. These heat exchangers are irreparable; if damaged, they must be replaced. While replacing these components may seem expensive, a new system will yield heightened efficiency, reducing monthly heating/ cooling costs substantially, and benefiting your long-term investment.

4. Older/ Unsafe Electrical System:

In older homes, it is common to find undersized services, aluminum wiring, knob-and-tub wiring, or insufficient/ badly-renovated distribution systems. When an electrical circuit is over-fused, more amperage is drawn on the circuit than what the circuit was intended to bear, creating a fire hazard. You'll typically find a 15 amp circuit in a home, with increased service for larger appliances such as dryers or stoves. If replacing your fuse panel with a circuit panel, expect a cost of several hundred dollars.

5. Older/ Leaking Roof:

An asphalt roof will last an average of 15 to 20 years. Leaks through the roof could be a sign of physical deterioration of the asphalt shingles caused by aging, or could indicate mechanical damage caused by any number of factors, such as a heavy storm. If you decide your roof requires new shingles, you'll first need to know how many layers are beneath, in order to determine whether the roof must be completely stripped before installing the new shingles.

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6. Minor Structural Problems:

Common in older homes, these problems range from cracked plaster to small shifts in the foundation. While this variety of problem isn't large enough to cause any real catastrophe, they should be taken care of before they grow.

7. Poor Ventilation:

Unvented bathrooms and cooking areas can become breeding areas for mold and fungus, which, in turn, lead to air quality issues throughout the house, triggering allergic reactions. Mold may additionally cause damage to plaster and window frames. These problems should be identified and taken care of before any permanent damage is caused.

8. Air Leakage:

A cold, drafty home can be the result of any number of problems, such as ill-fitting doors, aged caulking, low-quality weather strips, or poor attic seals. This nature of repair can usually be taken care of easily and inexpensively.

9. Security Features:

An inspector will look at the standard security features that protect your home, such as the types of lock on the doors/ windows/ patio doors, and the smoke or carbon monoxide detectors and where they're located throughout the home. Check with an expert if your home is lacking in any of these areas, in order to determine what costs to expect.

10. Drainage/ Grading Problems:

This may be the most common problem found by home inspectors, and is a widespread catalyst of damp and mildewed basements. Solutions to this problem may range from the installation of new gutters and downspouts, to re-grading the lawn and surrounding property in order to direct water away from the house.