

# MOBILE HOMES Valley Voice

OK Valley Home Inspections

A newsletter for **REALTORS, MOBILE HOME OWNERS AND PURCHASERS** - Understanding Mobile Homes

**M**obile homes are really just small houses, factory built in a controlled environment and moved to a site. They are built to local standards, but in BC, they must also be registered and be CSA certified. It's important to understand your mobile homes' structure, decks, additions and other improvements, when deciding to live in or purchase a mobile or manufactured home.

We are pleased to publish the first in this series of newsletters, discussing issues that **mobile home owners** should be aware of and what to expect.

## OVERVIEW - WHAT ARE THEY?

They are **not mobile** like 5th wheels or motorhomes. They are moved into their present site on wheels, but once the wheels are removed - they almost become a regular home - but supported on pedestal footings.

To build a mobile (or manufactured home) one starts with a strong, steel girder frame, running from one end of the unit to the other and reinforced along it's length with cross-members. Wiring\*, plumbing\*, drainage\*, heating ducts\*, gas service and other elements are installed between the steel frame and the bellyboard\* (a black membrane attached to the underside of the frame). The remaining cavity is filled with insulation, a vapour barrier is attached, and then a wood sub-floor is installed. From this point on, finishing generally follows standard construction practice - with a few exceptions.

Older units usually don't have an accessible attic cavity\* but they are all insulated. Older units have a curved metal roof\* with trusses spaced 12 inches apart; newer units have engineered trusses and gable roofing systems, usually covered with asphalt singles.

Newer homes will have a 100 amp service panel\* with appropriate breakers and service throughout the home. Many older units and parks have 60 amp. service\*, and overload protection is found throughout the park. Some

units have galvanized water service, but most have copper, PEX or PVC and most have a gas or electric water heater\*. Mobiles are manufactured with central forced-air heating systems and many older units have since been replaced or updated\*. Air-conditioning can be added as a window unit, as part of a heat-pump, as a freestanding or combination exterior unit or a roof-mounted system called a "swamp cooler" or evaporative cooler\*.

Every mobile home has at least one addition\*, generally at a rear exit - or a deck or living addition attached to the side of the home. These additions must be approved by the park manager but many may not meet traditional building and safety standards\*. It is not uncommon for owners to remove part of the exterior wall of a unit to allow access to the addition\*.

When older units were moved to the site, they were supported and levelled using railway ties or other treated structural members\* often without proper footings. Newer units have a combination of concrete footings and wood support members and shims. Mandatory skirting\* consists of wood, metal or vinyl, and basically prevents animals from nesting under the unit. All skirting should have ventilation\* to allow proper air flow under the unit.

*\* this item will be discussed in this or future newsletters.*

## PORCHES, ADDITIONS OR ADD-ONS

Almost every porch, addition or deck has been built by a well-meaning homeowner. Supports, however; may be small concrete pads (pyramid blocks), that often sink into the ground faster than "more secure" footings for the main unit. This will cause sloping of the addition (or deck) and a possible separation of the roof at the junction between the addition and the main unit. If excessive sloping is noticed, a larger and more stable footing should be placed under the additions' supports. Ideally, footings for the main unit (and any addition or deck) should extend below the frost line, but this is usually NOT the case in the central interior of BC. Inspectors will look at the roof transition between elements, as well as the vertical junction between the adjoining walls, from both inside and outside. Fixing a sloped floor by jacking up the addition is not always recommended - corrections might cause new problems. Unless the sloped floor is a real bother, it's easiest just to stabilize the supports to keep them from moving further. (See Page 2 - LEVELLING A MOBILE HOME)

## ATTIC OPENINGS

Older units were manufactured without an attic opening. The opening was omitted because the roof slope was so low that it would be useless to have “access” to this cavity. Unfortunately, inspectors are snoopy and we want to know what’s happening up there. Why? We want to look for **water leaks, insect damage, insulation, mould issues, skylight framing or venting**. Most of these issues cannot be determined from below, and unless we physically see evidence such as water stains or holes, we can’t even speculate on these concerns. Most moisture issues occur at the flashings or at roof edges. Each of these concerns will leave stains or moisture on the interior ceiling or walls.

## METAL ROOFS

At one time, mobiles had a metal roof which are continuous metal sheets that reached from one side of the unit to the other. These sheets are joined with a sealed seam which often have additional caulking applied. Unless something or someone has damaged the surface by punching a hole or breaking a seam, these roofs will last for many years without trouble. What do inspectors look for on metal roofs? **Roof transitions and edges, open seams, holes and damage, poor caulking or flashing at vents, skylights, chimneys and swamp coolers**. One of the critical areas of a metal roof is at the outside perimeter of the roof, just as it bends over the edge of the wall near the rain gutter. Any crack or opening in this area can allow water to enter the wall or ceiling cavity.

## RAIN GUTTERS (OR LACK OF GUTTERS)

It is not often that we find a unit without some sort of rain gutter, although they are sometimes difficult to see. It is hard to imagine some gutters doing a good job in a downpour. Most older gutters are merely a ¼ round metal flashing running from one end of the unit to the other. Unfortunately, these easily get filled with debris and really don’t do a great job, allowing water to run down outside walls. Water can run down skirting, entering the crawlspace or it can get behind finished walls, damaging

exterior trim, rim joists, flooring and sills. Gutters are suggested around **EVERY** building to control water. Ensure that downspouts carry water away from the unit.

## UTILITY HOOK-UPS & SHUT-OFFS

Most mobiles are located in traditional mobile home parks which supply basic services such as water, power and sewer. An electrical power shut-off is found in a metal breaker box, either under the unit or close to the back side of the unit. The electrical panel inside the unit also has a “shut off” breaker. There is also a “park meter” shut-off found in a small locked building or shelter located somewhere in the park. Potable water service under the home should be fully covered with insulation, however; if insulation is pulled back, we’ll find a plastic or metal water pipe with a shut-off valve. Because it’s not always convenient to access this valve in an emergency, a second shut-off is usually located somewhere inside the living quarters. This is found under or near one of the bathroom sinks, beside the water heater or under the kitchen sink. Your inspector will try to find this valve and point it out to you. Most often, they will have a blue handle.

## LEVELLING A MOBILE HOME

It is not uncommon to find a mobile, deck or an addition that has a sloped floor. Although mobiles are constructed with heavy steel girders, there can still be issues due to uneven settlement or damaged support members. Sloping floors happen in traditional homes as well, but could be harder to fix. If your unit or addition has sloped floors, and you want to address the issue, here are several things to consider **BEFORE** you start to twist the unit back into position: When did floors start sloping - days, months or years ago? Have the previous owners (or you) ever adjusted, modified or replaced the doors and windows? Will walls or windows crack if the unit or addition is moved? Will a correction affect ceiling junctions or exterior roof transitions of additions attached to the unit? Maybe just the floor needs levelling! This is a personal decision and you should discuss any concerns with the levelling company prior to work being done.



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### This is the first newsletter in this series.

Owning a mobile or manufactured home is a chosen or preferred lifestyle for many people. Besides the lower initial cost, there is the benefit of lower heating and cooling costs and the ability to move the unit if required. But, we also find issues that are unique to mobile home ownership. In this series of newsletters, I’ll try to help to identify some issues and non-issues that you’ll likely run across.

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