MOBILE HOMES
Valley Voice
OK Valley Home Inspections

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

If you plan on purchasing (or own) a mobile or manufactured home, it's important to understand the basic structure, deck design, additions and other attributes that are unique to this type of ownership.

These units are built to meet local building standards and when sold in BC, they must have a registration number and CSA certification.

We are pleased to publish the 2nd in this series of newsletters, discussing issues that ***mobile home owners*** *should be aware of and what to expect.*

WAS IT DESIGNED AS A DECK OR IS IT A PRE-PLANNED ADDITION?

One thing we know for sure about any home, is that they never seem to be big enough. Almost immediately after a "mobile" is set up, plans for a deck or new addition are started. A deck is usually designed first - they utilize lighter-weight construction materials, they have no roof, they're made with 2 x 6 members, have small concrete footings and could have 5/4" x 6" treated flooring. This seems to work OK until someone decides it would be nice to have a roof over the deck, Soon after, a wall might be added for privacy, and eventually, all three sides will be enclosed. Now instead of a deck, we have a "room" which eventually becomes **living quarters**. This is when issues start to show up, including: footings that are designed for a deck (not for a living space), floor joists, supporting beams or main supports that may not be strong enough, the addition may have been improperly "attached" to the main unit, roof transitions between the addition and the main unit may not be proper, sub-flooring may be too weak to support larger weights, there may be no insulation under the floor, in the walls or in the ceiling, electrical may have been illegally added, heating is often forgotten or improperly installed and larger additions may strain heating and cooling systems, wall seams between the main unit and the addition require proper seals, doors and windows often stop opening and closing properly. And if a bathroom is added, watch for even more concerns.

Most issues are not always obvious and some might turn into major concerns at some time - fortunately, most issues fall into the nuisance category. There are several things to know about additions (or "enclosed" decks).

1) if you are designing a deck, make sure it can be conveniently converted into living quarters;
2) if you are converting someone else's deck into living quarters, get a permit and make sure you confirm, improve and modify the original deck;
3) expect to get additional help with electrical, plumbing, heating, roof junctions and where roof members change directions);
4) check with the park manager to get all necessary approvals - and sometimes some great advice;
5) some day, you might want to put a large piano in your new addition... did you (or the guy before you) plan for this?

If you are building a deck or an addition, look for DIY books that show how to do this properly... and get a permit! This costs a little - but generally ensures that work is done right. Inspectors will try to determine if the design is proper, but without access to interior walls and other unexposed structure or materials, it is not always possible.

ELECTRICAL ISSUES - MAIN PANEL

When a unit leaves the factory, there is a real good chance that all electrical was up to current codes for that area and was installed using traditional electrical installation conventions. When an inspector checks the electrical panel, he is trying to see if someone has disturbed or modified the original wiring. This usually happens when **do-it-yourself** additions or workshops are added or when air-conditioning is installed. Issues that inspectors look for in the main panel include: wrong breaker/wire size combinations, new wiring without bushings or clamps, new wiring pulled through the main service area (usually by the AC guy), double lugged wiring (two wires on one breaker) and the size of the main electrical service - usually 100 amp.

MOBILE HOME SKIRTING

Almost every mobile home park requires that skirting be installed around the perimeter of decks, additions and the main unit. This is usually a non-structural trim that is essentially cosmetic in nature; however, many owners have also suggested that it helps to keep the flooring

warmer in winter. Skirting can be all-wood siding with wood framing at the top and bottom, metal siding with wood framing, vinyl siding with wood framing or vinyl siding with vinyl framing. We've also seen skirting material simply nailed to the sidewall, skirting that simply leans against the unit, metal doors (layed length-wise), screen doors, and at least 50 other variations. All seem to be approved or acceptable... to a point.

There are many requirements that should be considered when choosing skirting. There must be access openings for repairs to electrical, sewer, water, gas, dryer venting, heat tape, other maintenance and storage. One thing that is very important is the need for proper ventilation. By their design, moisture gets trapped under the unit and the soil under the unit may get wet. It is important to allow fresh air under the unit to help expel stale, moist air and to keep everything dry. Concerns with moisture include a higher incidence of insects and termites and deterioration of wooden structural members or supports. There are various ways of ensuring proper venting, but it is equally important to open these vents in summer and close them in winter. It is suggested that venting be installed on all four sides of the unit, plus on all walls of each addition. **The best type of skirting?** Vinyl siding with vinyl frame and designed "vent panels" spaced about four feet apart on all sides.

HEAT TAPE - FROZEN PIPES

Virtually every mobile home park includes basic services - water, sewer and power. The parks' water is located under the unit where it is protected from the weather and is generally located underground until it reaches the unit. Once the water service exits the soil, it is susceptable to freezing. We usually find a coil of fiberglass batt insulation wrapped around the area where it leaves the ground, protecting the main water shut-off valve. From this point on, until the water service enters the bottom of the unit, there should be adequate protection to prevent freezing. These options include: fibreglass batts wrapped along the full length of the pipe, electrical heat tape, foam pipe-wrap or a combination of any of these.

By far, the most effective is **electrical heat tape**. There are various manufactures of heat-tape, but they virtually all work on 120V power and all must make direct contact with the water service pipe. There are different types of heat tape for different types of pipe, so check to see if you have metal or PVC service. Be careful that tape is installed according to the manufactures specifications and do not loop tape back over itself. Most heat tapes do not have to be shut-off in summer (most will have a thermostat) but they should be checked yearly to make sure they are still plugged in and still work - unfortunately this can only be checked when it is cold enough. Consider replacing the tape every 3 - 5 years.

METAL ROOF NOISES

Metal roofing material lasts longer than conventional roofs but they do have some drawbacks. Obviously, in a hail storm, they are noiser than other types. When temperatures change quickly (or when the wind blows just right), they can "pop", making one wonder if the roof is too loose. Not to worry, they are designed to move over the roof rafters when they expand or contract. That is why it is imporant to make sure that roof repairs **DO NOT** include screwing the metal roof to the rafters. This could actually make the roof make more noise. Also, be careful when working on a metal roof, the metal panels are not really designed to walk on and seams can be damaged. Make sure to walk on the rafters, or think about using a floating board to walk on when doing repairs.

BC REGISTRATION - CSA CERTIFICATION

Every new mobile home sold in BC had a registration number and a CSA certification attached to the unit. The BC Registration decal is normally on the "main-door" side the unit, on the siding near the rear floorboards (or attached to the electrical panel or the cover, or both). CSA certification is found on a decal near the front door, but has also be found elsewhere. **DO NOT COVER THESE DECALS** without noting the numbers in a permanent position - they will be asked for.

This is the second 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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