

OK Valley Home Inspections *Where It's All About Knowledge*

Valley Voice

A newsletter for **REALTORS, MORTGAGE LENDERS, HOMEOWNERS** - Deal Closing 101

Now that the recession is almost over, interest rates are low and the HST has not yet been introduced, its time to ensure that every listing is in the best condition possible. The purchasers' inspector will find fewer concerns if the home has been pre-inspected. And it's easier to make repairs in advance of the sale and choose your own professionals.

I am pleased to publish the eleventh in this series of newsletters, discussing concerns that **should** be addressed **before** the purchasers' Inspection.

INADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR STAIRWELLS AND IMPROPER RISE AND RUN

How often have you ran down a set of stairs and had the feeling that they were bouncing or swaying back and forth? How about that final step at the bottom that is 12 inches high instead of the usual 8 inches or so? Kinda makes your teeth rattle when you hit the ground. Both of these concerns are a result of poor workmanship and design. **Steps should not sway or bounce and every step, from top to bottom should be the same height.** Also, all treads should be the same width. Standards suggest that the sum of the rise and run should be somewhere around 17 inches (i.e., 9" wide, 8" high.)

REGRADE SOIL THAT SLOPES TOWARD THE HOME TO CONTROL EXCESS WATER

One of the more serious concerns of many homeowners is the worry about water entering the basement. Unfortunately, water is lazy and does not differentiate between a hole in the ground and a below-grade basement. Also, we all know that pourous materials will absorb water usually until it becomes wet on both sides. So it is with concrete basement walls... they will absorb water and get wet and **almost all will leak** if

there is enough water present. The secret of keeping a basement dry is to prevent the water from getting in. This means having a proper water seal on the outside concrete wall (usually not visible), having a good perimeter drainage system, and keeping water as far away from the basement walls as is possible. Previous discussions on this have included the importance of **downspouts and gutters**, watching placement of water **sprinkler heads** and **hose bibs**, and **proper grading** of soil in the area around the basement wall. **Always ensure grading around the home will direct water away.**

LEAVE ONE METRE CLEAR SPACE IN FRONT OF THE ELECTRICAL PANEL

Electricians, and other people who do work inside electrical panels, like to have some room in front of the electrical panel. It is hard to work on a panel if there is a deep-freeze, washing machine, dryer or a cabinet in the way. Sometimes the homeowner will build a wall in front of the panel, leaving only a small working place to stand. It is required that a space of 1 meter of clear space be left directly in front of all panel boxes, giving workers a place to stand or a place to move to should a shock be felt.

FIX SIDING THAT NEEDS PAINTING, IS LOOSE, DAMAGED OR HAS HOLES

Besides looking good, siding has several other uses. Most properly installed siding is designed to resist water from rain or sprinklers and is designed to interlock, such as vinyl and metal products. Most wood products overlap and are designed to repel water. Stucco siding is usually a series of continuous layers of cement material. Bricks are designed to repel water on the outside surface but should have a drainage gap behind to allowing water that seeps through to drain out holes in the bottom row of bricks. All finishes should have a waterproof membrane between itself and wooden structural members and all need proper flashing over windows and doors.

Siding can reduce air flow somewhat and most surfaces discourage insects and plant materials from entering the home. And, some siding actually has an R-rating and can add somewhat to the insulation value of the wall.

In all cases, it is important to ensure that **ALL holes, cracks and openings are caulked** properly to keep out moisture and insects. **Paint** all wood surfaces to prevent rot and protect the surface.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF "A HOME INSPECTOR"

Two questions that I have been asked by clients, agents and other home inspectors are: **"How do YOU do an inspection?"** and **"What special tools or equipment do you use?"** These are good questions... as these are exactly the things that often set one **home inspector** apart from another.

Inspectors in BC, and in fact, most inspectors who have met some sort of recognized educational standard, usually follow a specific Standard of Practice (SOP). Briefly, this outlines **the minimum that an inspector should be looking at** and, it **defines the way we describe things**. Each SOP differs slightly from the next, but generally, they are all pretty close.

Many inspectors will offer services that exceed the SOP, and others will inadvertently (or negligently) fall short. It should be noted that inspectors who exceed the requirements of the SOP do so at their own risk. For example, in BC we are not required (or technically trained) to inspect **wall-mounted air conditioners**. If an inspector decides to make a comment about the unit, it will usually be some sort of description regarding it's operation. But, because we have no guidelines in our SOP, he might not describe the entire unit. Our client might presume that he has also looked at the power source, the cooling elements, the controller, it's mounting, etc., which might not be the case.

Interestingly, I am one of those inspectors who choose to exceed the **CAHPI** standards...but only in a few specific areas. For instance, I usually include the water temperature of the water heater in my report. This helps me determine the condition of the water heater and assists my client in identifying a potential "scald" hazard. I also "look at" major appliances and write down serial numbers. This is a courtesy extended to my clients to ensure that appliances are not exchanged prior to possession. It is very unlikely that I will run an appliance through all of it's cycles, as this would take hours and generally require cooking a dinner or doing a load of laundry. NOT gonna happen!

Like many home inspectors, I follow a specific route as I travel around and through the home. I check the exterior first, then move inside into the basement, followed by the main floor and then finish up in the attic. Outside, I'll look for things such as poor drainage, trees that might be a problem and structural concerns such as poorly built decks, fences, gates, siding, doors and windows, etc. On the roof, I look at chimneys, flashing and the roof covering... including gutters, fascias and soffits.

Inside, I examine the plumbing, electrical and heating systems, then observe the walls, flooring and ceilings. A water stain on the ceiling would certainly merit a closer look in the attic or another trip onto the roof. Even the basement ceiling would be looked at if it looked serious.

When the physical inventory is completed, the actual report is written. If the client is present, we'll walk through the property and discuss the key features...both good and bad, as well as locating all major shut-offs or valves.

Tools and equipment include: a ladder, flashlight and an assortment of **screwdrivers, nut drivers** and **pliers**. Almost all inspectors have an **inhaler mask, knee pads, monkey suit, gloves** and a **cap**. When testing power I need a **polarity tester** and a 110 - 220 V **circuit tester**. HVAC systems require an accurate thermometer. For plumbing systems, I use a **thermometer, pressure gauge** and even a **magnet**. In attics, crawlspaces, flooring, walls... I'll pull out a **moisture meter** and an **infrared camera**.

Other tools of the trade, depending on additional needs, include: a **hand mirror, gas leak detector, CO test meter, Rh gauge, small brush, magnifying glass, lighter, digital camera** and a **first aid kit**.

The best tools? My eyes, my nose, my intuition and my experience.

THERMAL IMAGING INSPECTIONS

In conjunction with a moisture meter and other special tools, using an **INFRARED CAMERA** has improved the quality of my inspections. These cameras don't actually find mould, water or insects, but they accurately measure small differences in surface temperatures. If an unexpected temperature variation is found, I still need to do a physical in-depth examination of the area to determine the cause. Air flow behind walls, moisture under floors and overheated electrical components show up quickly and safely. This extended examination can reduce callbacks and increase client satisfaction and confidence.

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Pre-Listing and Pre-Purchase Inspections throughout the
Okanagan and Nicola Valleys



WCB - E&O

KIETH R. SUTFIN, RHI
Cell: (250) 317-3349
Toll Free: 1-888-575-7784