

# OK Valley Home Inspections Valley Voice Where It's All About Knowledge

Vol III No. 5 A newsletter for **REALTORS, MORTGAGE LENDERS, HOMEOWNERS** (and other inspectors)

**H**ome Inspectors in BC are licensed by Consumer Protection BC. To become fully licensed, inspectors must simply be a member of a home inspection association and pass a series of exams. Experience is **NOT** necessary and many “licensed inspectors” may have only completed a small number of inspections.

**See page 2 for recommendations**

This newsletter discusses some of the concerns that are often noted on a typical inspection report and explains some of the wording used.

## **SLABS THAT SLOPE TOWARDS THE HOME CAN CAUSE WATER CONCERNS**

Any time concrete driveways, sidewalks or patios slope toward the home, there is an increased chance of water (rain, snow or irrigation) entering the home. Generally, “normal” amounts of water can be handled by traditional exterior membrane or drainage systems. However, when higher volumes of water flow against the foundation wall, chances are increased substantially. Even the smallest crack is now susceptible to leaking. It's best to lift (slab jack) the concrete and slope it away from the foundation wall. If you cannot lift the slab, then ensure there is proper caulking is in place with proper drainage away from the home. (Google “slab jacking” in your area”)

## **GAPS BETWEEN DECK BOARDS CAN FILL WITH DEBRIS AND TRAP WATER**

When decks or steps are built, tradesmen often leave a space between boards. These gaps are important because they allow air circulation under and around the deck surface, but they also allow wood to dry after getting wet. But all too often, leaves, weeds, pine needles and other debris clog these gaps. Clean these gaps annually as damage to decks and structures can be severe if water stays in contact with wood members. Pools of water ponding on a wood surface can become slippery and dangerous as well.

## **SMOKE DETECTORS SHOULD BE WORKING AND REPLACED OFTEN**

All homes must have working smoke detectors and most homes should have a carbon monoxide alarm. There are two types of smoke detectors (photoelectric and ion), both work well and either can be hard-wired or battery operated. Most fire departments will suggest that these units be replaced between 5 and 7 years...never more than 10 years... they actually wear out, get dirty or corrode, losing sensitivity. Smoke detectors are usually mounted high on a wall in very specific places in the home, primarily near bedrooms. They react very quickly to minute particles of smoke (we've all burnt toast).

Carbon monoxide detectors do not react as quickly and generally, they can be located either high or low on a wall where air circulation is good. Homes with attached garages, gas appliances (such as water heaters, furnaces, gas dryers) or gas fireplaces should have a CO detector. Most of these are hard-wired and have a battery backup. These can be difficult to test during a home inspection.

## **IF WOODEN STRUCTURAL MEMBERS TOUCH CONCRETE - USE A MEMBRANE**

Most tradespeople know they should never have wood structural members directly touching or resting on a concrete surface. Concrete is porous and moisture can seep through and travel quite a distance, especially if the concrete is in moist soil. The surface may look dry, but try putting an upside-down glass jar on the surface! Moisture can be absorbed by wood members which can be damaged. All that is usually required to solve the problem is a poly membrane or a foam media designed especially for this use - available at most home supply stores. We've even seen roofing shingles being used for concrete deck and walkway supports.

## **GUTTERS THAT DRAIN ONTO A LOWER ROOF FROM AN ELEVATED ROOF**

Many roofers and architects do not like to see an excessive number of downspouts, especially if the roof has many levels. They prefer to let collected water channel into the closest or most convenient downspout and have it flow onto the nearest roof surface. This water can wear granules off shingles, move gravel on tar-and-gravel roofs and damage wood roofs. Downspouts do not cost much, so it may be worthwhile to add extensions.

## LOCATE AND ADD WATER TO FLOOR DRAINS AND "P" TRAPS IN BASEMENTS, CRAWLSPACES OR LAUNDRY ROOMS

Floor drains in a basement or crawlspace are extremely important as they allow excess water (which should not be in the basement anyway) a convenient way to leave. This includes flood water, water leaks from interior plumbing, drains from water softeners, humidifiers, air conditioners and high efficiency furnaces. Drains are often covered with rugs or vinyl floor covering and sometimes, if they are starting to smell, they may be blocked or plugged.

Tradespeople will always look for a convenient drain to

expel water into if needed, and if not found, they'll simply install an electric water pump and direct the water to another convenient location.

Almost every drain has a "P" trap, meaning that water is purposely caught in a loop in the pipe (sometimes under the concrete floor) which protects sewer gasses from being released into the living quarters. Unfortunately, this trapped water can evaporate over time and starts to emit a sewer smell. Just "top up" the drain on a regular basis.

To protect against floods (and to ensure the drain has water in it) always make sure the drain is visible and accessible.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF "A HOME INSPECTOR"

In BC, all home inspectors must be **LICENSED** by Consumer Protection BC. Requirements for licensing include proof of insurance and proof of professional affiliation. Major home inspection associations require passing a series of 7 or 8 proctored exams (however, one actually offers a FREE 1 - hour test over the internet). Once they pass their exams, they can get insurance and apply to the provincial government for their license. This means that virtually anyone can qualify as a "licensed" inspector - often with little or no experience. So how do you choose an inspector? Here's a few tips.

**(1) DO NOT PRICE SHOP.** When choosing an inspector, you're basically hiring an advocate with **YOUR** best interests in mind. **Professional training, certifications, specialized equipment and continuing education never comes cheap**, and therefore, their expertise isn't going to be cheap either. Make sure you're hiring an inspector with significant knowledge and training. When it comes to choosing a home inspector - **YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR.** Cheapest is not always the best.

**(2) RESEARCH THEIR CREDENTIALS.** Try to determine the highest level the inspector has achieved within his association. Some associations use words like

"candidate", "associate" or "trainee" - levels that basically mean that the inspector **has not met** the all the necessary requirements to be fully qualified. You'll find most trainees, candidates or associates shy away from displaying their credentials (or lack of). To be sure of getting the highest professional level, qualified CAHPI or Nationally Certified inspectors will proudly display **RHI** after their name. BCIPI inspectors use **CHI** or **CPI**, and NACHI inspectors claim to be "certified". Check their "membership" status on their related websites to determine if they are a "candidate", "associate" or "trainee" - many still claim to be "qualified and licensed".

As a point of interest, one of the professional associations actually permits the inspector to take basic courses such as **plumbing** and **electrical**, **AFTER they have been certified...**mmm??

**(3) HOW MANY "HOME INSPECTIONS" have they REALLY COMPLETED?** Many inspectors imply that they have **years and years of experience** and often suggest they are **ticketed** or **licensed** as an electrician, plumber or carpenter. **Ask to see their license.** If it has not already lapsed, he'll be happy to show it to you (*don't brag about it if you don't have it*). Beware if they can't produce it. Most of their so-called experience has **NOT** been as a home inspector.

**(4) MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION.** There are times when an agent or other professional will recommend a specific inspector. Besides the obvious conflict of interest issues, this also shows poor judgement, as it can backfire should anything go wrong with the inspection.

**FORTUNATELY, reputable agents supply a list of three or four inspectors who they believe are qualified, honest and thorough.** Check around and make your own decision - based on diligent research. Finally, you can always refer to the inspectors' website for more information.



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