

**A**fter 8 years of being a full-time inspector in BC's interior, and wandering through almost 1600 houses, condos and mobiles, it was extremely hard to compile my "**Top 12 Frequently Found Problems or Concerns**".

Generally, **NEWER** homes have fewer concerns... until the homeowner starts their **DIY** projects (usually without permits). That's when the fun begins!

Are there any homes without concerns? Sure... but I haven't found that many!

## 1. ELECTRICAL

Electrical concerns represent one of the most common problems I find. These problems can kill you - or burn your house down. Typical concerns include: improper breakers or wiring sizes, missing cover plates, loose electrical boxes, missing clamps or bushings in panel boxes, improper wiring connections or splices, unprotected wiring, improper grounding and polarity.

**Tops on my list:** missing covers, missing clamps or bushings, poor wiring practices and wrong polarity.

## 2. POORLY DESIGNED DECKS AND EXTERIOR STAIRWAYS

Most decks, those built as part of the original home, are generally OK; but many **DIY** decks and stairways are **a disaster in both design and safety**. Concerns include: poor footing design, improper joist spans and beams, poor wall anchoring, poor choice of fasteners, inadequate surface preparation, improper slope, missing or out-of-code handrails and guardrails. Many decks and stairways are touching soil and will suffer water damage over time.

**Tops on my list:** poorly designed and not-to-code footings, handrails and guardrails, improper fasteners and poor construction practices.

## 3. HEATING AND COOLING

Forced-air heating systems should be inspected annually to ensure proper sequencing of operations and built-in safety devices. Concerns include: proper flame pattern, gas leaks, potentially dangerous or cracked heat exchangers, dangerously old furnaces, improper vent clearances, restricted combustion air and furnaces located in bedrooms. Dirty furnaces and filters are a fire hazard and missing register covers contribute to poor heating and cooling distribution. Air conditioner condenser units should be cleaned to remove dryer fluff and garden debris such as dirt, grass clippings and leaves. Electric baseboard heaters should have covers removed and cleaned before each heating season.

**Tops on my list:** older low-efficiency furnaces, improper clearances to combustibles, dirty furnace filters, heat ducts vented into the garage, missing register covers, dirty or deteriorated chimneys.

## 4. STRUCTURE

This is an area where the **DIY** guys create some unique concerns. The most serious faux pas are cut or damaged floor joists or beams; but other concerns include improper clearances, missing headers over doors and windows, poor stairwell design, removal of support walls, improper sizing of joists, inadequate sub-floor prep for tiles, poor workmanship and improper support for load bearing elements.

**Tops on my list:** damaged or cut structural members, improper joist spans and poor sub-floor preparation.

## 5. PLUMBING - HEATERS AND LEAKS

Water leaks are always a major concern. Water heaters should be examined for leaks on a regular basis as many are only guaranteed for 5 years... after that, there is reason for concern. Look for leaks or rust at pipe connections, moisture damage under sinks, loose toilets, damaged tile around tubs, wet floors around tubs and toilets, improper piping design and missing or improper support clamps. Insurance people want to know if there is any galvanized piping.

**Tops on my list:** Water heaters over 10 years old, missing utility pans/drainage, improper support of service piping, leaks at toilets and bathtubs, poor tile around showers.

## 6. EXTERIOR FINISH

The building envelope is designed to prevent pests, air and water from entering the home... under normal weather conditions for your area. All window and door openings should have proper flashing, all trim should be sealed, open seams in siding should be caulked, painted surfaces should be in good condition, wood window frames, sills and mullions should be checked for damage, repaired and painted.

**Tops on my list:** improper or missing window flashing, damaged fascias, soffits and trim, missing caulking at trim and siding material, soil, trees and plant material climbing on or touching an exterior wall finish.

## 7. ATTICS AND VENTING

When checking an attic, inspectors look for signs of moisture (from above), air infiltration (from below), the depth of insulation (some say equivalent of R-40 in attics), a vapour barrier, proper venting from bathrooms or kitchens, insulated vents, poor attic ventilation, and evidence of mould-like material (fungi) and pests such as wasps, mice and raccoons.

**Tops on my list:** Inadequate ceiling insulation, disturbed or compressed insulation, poor venting and ventilation fans venting directly into the attic.

## 8. POOR PERIMETER DRAINAGE

Water getting into a basement is a huge concern for most people - but about 90% of it can be controlled by the homeowner. Cleaning debris from gutters and adding downspout extensions is critical. There must be proper slope away from the foundation wall. **DIY** guys often forget that water is lazy and will head towards the closest hole in the ground... which is usually the basement. Dam it or get it to go somewhere else!

**Tops on my list:** improper distance between the home and downspout exits, sidewalks, driveways and soil that is sloping towards the home, flowerbeds and irrigation systems beside the foundation wall.



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## 9. BATHROOMS

Bathrooms have a wide variety of potential concerns, many involving water leaks and inadequate ventilation. Toilets should be tight on the floor, sink and tub taps should not drip or leak, fixtures should be water-tight at the taps, wall junctions, soap dish, floor junction and shower head. Excess moisture left from a shower, a bath or drying clothes should be power-vented to the outside of the home. Moisture and humidity in the home has very little or no benefit for the house itself... normally, it's only good for people.

**Tops on my list:** water damage under floor coverings, missing or inoperable ceiling fans, and unsealed or damaged grout around tubs and showers.

## 10. ROOFS AND DRAINAGE

Roofing shingles last between 15 and 25 years (some of today's generation of shingles may last longer) and most homes will have new shingles installed about every 20 years. Leaks often appear at "penetrations" in the roof surface such as chimneys, vents, or skylights, so caulking and flashing should be in good condition. Gutters and downspouts are essential in directing rainwater away from the home.

**Tops on my list:** Gutters that are full of debris, not properly connected, leaking, broken, loose or damaged flashing, moss and other debris on the roof surface and valleys, and of course, damaged shingles.

## 11. GARAGE

Inspectors should include looking at garage door operation, visible openings between the garage and living quarters, electrical service, flooring, weatherstripping, insulation and people access doors.

**Tops on my list:** many overhead doors do not "stop and reverse", human access-doors without an auto-close mechanism (and do not close tightly, allowing poisonous gas fumes to leak into the living quarters).

## 12. OTHER STUFF - IMPORTANT THINGS

There are many little things that are found in many resale homes. **This list includes:** batteries removed from smoke or CO detectors, loose or missing handrails, broken window seals, pet damage, dirty chimneys, damaged window and door screens, damaged weatherstripping, broken doorbells or deadbolts, unheated rooms, inadequate power outlets, open seams in floors, and mould.

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