

Valley Voice

OK Valley Home Inspections Where It's All About Knowledge and Experience

A Newsletter for **REALTORS, MORTGAGE LENDERS, HOMEOWNERS** (and other inspectors)

One of the more satisfying and exciting parts of my job is helping people with their first home purchase. Property virgins, first-time buyers, young couples, singles, newlyweds...all need a little "extra care" - as most have absolutely no ownership experience. They are fun to help! All "newbies" should know **"what they are buying, how it works and how to fix it"**. I have four kids, and they've all needed help - and I'm glad they asked.

WHO ARE THE NEWBIES?

I've inspected homes for people as young as eighteen (who have inherited a whack of money), unmarried couples, newlyweds (who've decided to buy a home while on their honeymoon), single men, single women, kids buying a home for their parents, close friends and a feisty "senior" who was purchasing her very first home.

WHAT DO THEY HAVE IN COMMON?

Most newbies are uncertain, nervous, and confused by all the paperwork, the imposed deadlines and all the other conditions of sale. **There is just so much stuff to absorb.** Many of them know little or nothing about buying a home or what to do with it after they move in.

I can't help them with the first few issues, but I do know a lot about houses. At every inspection, I try very hard to share my knowledge and take as much time as is necessary to show them the most "important" things.

WHAT IS IT THAT THEY REALLY NEED TO KNOW?

Other than the obvious financial considerations, home ownership issues can be broken down into several main components: (1) **ongoing compulsory maintenance** and (2) **proactive repairs & upkeep.**

Hand-in-hand with these are: (3) budgeting concerns, (4) experience, (5) tools required and (6) taxes, etc. Hundreds of books have been written on each of these topics so I will not get into a lot of detail. At a later time, I will discuss things like lawn care, underground sprinklers and pools, to name a few. Many of my clients have never

repaired broken a door, replaced a toilet or know where to start to hang a ceiling fan. Some are deathly afraid to go into their crawlspace or attic - and most shouldn't even think about going up on a roof. They will change their thinking eventually, but in the meantime...

WHAT ARE THE BASIC "MUST-KNOWS"?

Switches, valves and various shaped handles are extremely important - so important in fact, that many of them are actually **coloured!** These are usually safety and emergency shut-off devices and are there for a purpose!

Locate and label the main water valve, the main power breaker, the irrigation handle, the furnace switch and all the natural gas shut-off valves. Anyone who spends time alone in the home, should know where these are.

FURNACES have three major components: (1) a thermostat, (2) a motor, and (3) a heating chamber. If any of these fails, you won't get heat. Familiarize yourself with these components, or at least have a working knowledge of what they do when they **are** operating correctly.

SIDE NOTE: **Most newer furnaces do not have a pilot light or a fan belt - so don't look for them.** At the inspection, I'll let you know if you have them or not.

WATER HEATERS are either gas or electric... both are common. Gas units usually have more problems...they have more parts that can fail, they leak more often, they quit working without warning, they all use gas and fire to heat the water and they have a chimney. Electric units generally have fewer parts to wear out, they rarely "fail" without some sort of pre-warning and they are not particularly dangerous. Everyone should know how to turn them off and how to shut off the water and fuel source.

GAS SMELLS... if you smell gas or know you have a gas leak, grab the kids, the cat and your cell phone and exit the home immediately, leaving the doors open. Call your local gas supplier. Don't have the number?... call 911 then add it as a fav on your cell.

WATER DAMAGE generally falls into three major categories, and all of them can be costly if not corrected quickly. (1) **Roof leaks** usually show up as stains on the upper floor ceiling or walls, (2) **Interior water leaks** can come from broken pipes, faulty drains and over-flowed tubs, toilets or sinks and can show up as stains or moisture on floors, basement ceilings, under sinks, inside cupboards, or wet walls. (3) **Exterior water leaks** from the



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outside wall or floor in the basement can be due to poor roof or perimeter drainage, improper grading, leaky hose bibs, over-watering or natural ground water or flooding.

No matter which area of the home is being affected by moisture, **it must be stopped immediately!** Right now! Quickly! Pronto! **Water found where it should not be found... can be serious - mould and moisture damage comes to mind!**

OK! WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT?

If you smell something or hear strange noises coming from an electrical appliance or fixture, you have to do something right now! Sometimes it's just a breaker or fuse that has blown...do you know how to re-set it? When should you "unplug" - or when should you "trip" (a breaker). What should you do when the power goes out in a bathroom wall outlet? Is it a GFCI outlet? Does it connect to a similar unit somewhere else in the house? Or did a breaker at the main panel trip? What to do?

Always listen for strange or unexpected noises coming from your major appliances.

Furnaces don't need a lot of owner-maintenance, but you certainly have to change, clean or replace a dirty furnace filter (summer and winter). If the furnace is over 10 years old, have it checked professionally. You'll need basic service with air conditioners, heat pumps, humidifiers and baseboard heaters.

Water heaters do not require much attention, other than the occasional draining of the tank to eliminate sediment. Check the valve on the side or top of the tank for leaks and look for significant corrosion where the pipes enter or exit the tank. Look in the pan for water. If it is gas, make sure the metal chimney is properly sealed where needed.

If water is leaking beside or behind any appliance or fixture... **shut off the water and find out why.** Could be a leaky pipe, a worn washer, a damaged

valve, etc. If it's a hot water leak, shut off the water at the water heater - this will keep your toilet water flowing.

Kitchen and laundry appliances are not usually inspected by home inspectors, although some will identify the brand and give you part of the serial number. Some will check to see if they are leaking, are vented properly and are draining the way they should - as well as activating them thru a cycle.

And finally, decks which are "professionally built" generally have few problems... a deck built on the weekend by an unqualified homeowner, needs to be watched very, very carefully.

Unless your inspector is extremely busy or chooses not to share his time, he should ensure that all his clients benefit from a thorough, fully explained overview of the home, its major components and maintenance concerns. Especially the property virgins.

Home maintenance is extremely important, not only for your personal safety, but for the health of your family, their comfort and everyone's financial well-being. Deferring maintenance can lead to wood damage, rust, mould, costly replacement issues and huge repair bills.

If it squeaks and it shouldn't, oil it. If it doesn't move and it should, try WD-40. If it moves and it shouldn't, use duct tape. These are sayings that everyone should follow...maybe not to the letter, but you get the idea.

As a property virgin, you should be aware that I have been offering my clients a **FREE lifetime telephone consultation** option - - call me about any issue in the home, advice on purchasing major appliances (such as heat pumps and HRV's), or just common-sense, basic-language help with maintenance issues. Maybe we can't solve every problem together, but isn't it nice to know that you don't have to call a professional (or your dad or ex), whenever something doesn't seem right? I don't have all the answers but I don't have a vested interest in your property and I won't try to sell you something. You need an honest opinion and the best help I can give. Did I say FREE?

But, I have to warn you. Every new homeowner will eventually dedicate a drawer, box, shed or an entire room, to be filled with tools and other stuff to fix or make repairs. Everyone will want to remodel their entire home eventually. And you'll know it'll be easy, because you've watched them do it on TV. **NOT!**



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