

# Valley Voice

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

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

**T**his newsletter deals with a few of the ongoing maintenance issues that should be dealt with prior to our wet season - we actually have a rainy season in the interior! I've also addressed a few issues that were found inside the home, a potential fire concern and a damage control problem. All inspectors find a few queries in just about every property... even new homes have some issues.

## **PROPER CLEARANCE BETWEEN METAL CHIMNEY FLUES AND WALLS**

Inspectors look carefully at the area around gas furnaces and water heaters - especially if we notice new or modified walls. These utility services were probably installed properly **BEFORE** there were any modifications in the area - but after a little "homeowner" construction, there may be reason for concern.

There are different types of gas exhaust pipes or flues, and the cheapest and most common is a single-wall steel pipe. This pipe can get very hot and there is a concern when walls or ceilings get too close - it might ignite. Gas and fire professionals want at least 15 cm (6 inches) between these flues and any combustible material - such as wood framing, wall coverings and even the paper on drywall material. The easy fix is to have some metal installed between the chimney pipe and the combustible materials.

## **I LOST TWO JOBS RECENTLY - BUT I'M STILL HANDING OUT KUDOS**

I had two inspections booked in the south Okanagan recently. The day before the first confirmed inspection, I was called by the "selling" agent, who I've known for many years. This was an older home, built around 1920. Typically, these homes have many of the traditional "**problem concerns**" but most have been corrected by now. This means that the original furnace, water heater, service wiring and most of original plumbing has already been upgraded and replaced.

There are other concerns with very old homes as well. The wall and ceiling insulation does not likely meet today's standards - and it is probably wood chip (which means it may have sagged leaving a void near the top of walls). The walls, windows, and doors were originally painted with "leaded" paint, and covered over by several layers of newer paint.

In the case of this "heritage" home, the agent knew from experience that the home was saturated with products which originally contained asbestos. (*see Valley Voice #25 for a list*). Most purchasers can deal with paint, plumbing and insulation issues, but asbestos removal can be a daunting and expensive task. The agent asked the vendor if he would be willing to remove the asbestos at his expense; however, it appeared that this was NOT going to happen. The agent actually killed the deal on behalf of his client, until this issue can be resolved. Kudos to the agent for stepping in and potentially saving the purchaser heaps of money and unwanted concern.

The second cancelled inspection was a call directly from my client - the purchaser. Her internal radar went up when she examined **Form B** from the condo association. Seems they had almost no money in their contingency account and there were no engineering studies, inspections or other analysis of the common property elements. In BC, it is common to have an audit of assets, indicating life expectancies or projected costs for replacement (or upkeep) of common and fixed assets. She was concerned enough to talk it over with her lawyer. I think he said "**run!**".

She apologized to me several times over, assuming that I would "**be mad at her - like everyone else**". Apparently, a final deal was close and several of the principals involved in the sale were upset when she walked away. I say "kudos to her" - for understanding the **importance of due diligence** and to her lawyer, who may have saved her thousands of dollars in extraordinary charges via her strata fees. And no, I was not mad... no one should purchase a property and regret it later... it's just not right.

## **IMPROPER, MISSING OR DAMAGED GUTTERS AND DOWNSPOUTS**

Although there are few "national standards" for the installation of gutters and downspouts, they have a very

important function. Gutters and downspouts are intended to control and direct water from a roof - to a proper drainage area (to prevent water from entering the home or causing other problems). **Unfortunately, over 90% of water entering a basement, can be traced back to the roof.** If gutters are filled with debris, have serious leaks or have missing parts, then they cannot do their job properly - they should be checked and cleaned as often as needed. When cleaning debris from a gutter, check for leaking seams or missing or disconnected downspouts. Water from a downspout should be directed 1½ to 2 meters (4 to 6 feet) away from a foundation wall or into an designated underground drainage system. If the home has tree branches, leaves or needles in the gutters, consider installing one of the many foam or metal gutter screens available from most hardware stores. Even when these are used, you'll still have to peek under them to make sure of proper slope, mud dams and damaged areas.

### **WOOD DECK SUPPORTS OR ROOF SUPPORTS SHOULD NOT CONTACT SOIL**

Wood deck or deck covering supports should rest on concrete pads or footings. I often find the tops of footings covered with soil, grass or mulch - which means moisture can be trapped along the bottom of the posts. I've also found structural supports that are simply planted into the soil (like a fence post) with no protection from moisture or pest damage. No matter how well the wood has been treated, **ALL WOOD WILL ROT** over time.

Always ensure that support posts are resting on a solid footing of some sort, above the moisture level, and not in contact with soil, mulch, wood chips or even gravel (the voids will get filled with dirt eventually).

On a similar note, always watch for wooden stair stringers that rest on grass, gravel or soil. The bottom of the stringer **will** deteriorate. If the stairs can be physically lifted from the bottom by pulling on them, place a few bricks or concrete blocks under each stringer bottom. A

piece of roofing shingle or other waterproof material can be slid between the wood and the concrete to keep the two apart. Add a little slope to the brick or concrete to help with drainage.

### **ENSURE ALL PIPES ARE SUPPORTED WITH PROPER PIPE HANGERS.**

Homeowners always seem to want water service in a different place than where it was originally. Sometimes pipes have to be moved to fit around walls, other times they sag, bang, creak or make other irritating noises. That's when homeowners decides to "fix the problem" with a "some sort of support". I've seen pipes held in place with everything from bent-over nails, electrical wiring, furnace ducting, other pipes, zap-straps and pantyhose - but nothing works as well as a 20¢ hanger that was designed for the job.

Improper choice for a pipe hanger can cause problems including; noises, electrochemical corrosion, or damaged pipe (cuts or excessive compression). Pipe hangers come in various sizes and are made out of plastic, steel or copper. So does pipe! A perfect match! Never use a steel pipe hanger (or nail) with copper pipe. Don't use a copper or steel pipe hanger with plastic pipe. **SIMPLE!**

### **SEAL THE SEAM BETWEEN SINKS AND COUNTERTOPS**

There is usually a rubber, mastic or silicone seal between the kitchen or bathroom sink and the countertop. This seal may have been overlooked or damaged. Sealing this junction properly will help keep out moisture and makes cleaning the countertop easier and healthier... this is one of the most unsanitary places in a kitchen. If it is a wood-based countertop, water seeping under this lip can damage the surface and cause it to lift, warp or deteriorate - once damaged by water, there is no way to make it look new again.

### **ELIMINATE THOSE PERMANENTLY INSTALLED EXTENSION CORDS**

Nothing says "**power concerns**" more blatantly than a large number of extension cords hanging from rafters or snaking between rooms. These temporary cords often disappear when the owner moves, but at an inspection, potential buyers and inspectors see them as an indicator of inadequate power service! I've seen temporary cords used for air-conditioners, ceiling fans, outdoor sheds, deep-freezers, water softeners, garage door openers, sprinkler controllers, central vacuums, all sorts of light fixtures and sump or sewage ejector pumps. **Almost all of these applications should have a permanent electrical connection to a dedicated wall or ceiling outlet.**



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