

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

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

Realtors often discuss curb appeal, de-cluttering & painting. Adding a “pre-listing home inspection” as part of the initial listing dialogue is also suggested. We’ve all seen deals come to an abrupt halt after major defects, or a truckload of smaller concerns, are found after at the buyers’ inspection.

No one can afford to loose a sale due to poor maintenance or bad design choices. **OK Valley Home Inspections** wants to continue with our list of concerns that should be addressed before the buyers’ inspection. **Lets close the deal the first time!!**

PATIO SLABS THAT SLOPE TOWARDS THE HOME CAN ALLOW WATER TO ENTER

Any time that concrete driveways, sidewalks or patios slope toward the home, there is an increased chance of unwanted water (rain, snow or irrigation) entering the home. Generally, “normal” water can be handled by traditional exterior membrane 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 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. All to often, leaves, weeds, pine needles and other debris clogs these gaps. Clean these gaps annually as damage to decks and structures can be severe if water stays in contact with wood members. 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, loosing 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 developers 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 where needed.

LOCATE AND ADD WATER TO FLOOR DRAINS IN THE BASEMENT

Floor drains in a basement or crawlspace are extremely important as they allow excess water (which should not be in the basement) 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. We've seen many houses where the drains have been dedicated as a convenient option for a new shower drain. Drains are often covered with rugs or vinyl floor covering and sometimes (if they start to smell) they are simply blocked or plugged. **All of these options should be avoided.**

Tradespeople will always look for a convenient drain to expel water into if needed, and if not found, they'll simply charge you to 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 (under the concrete floor) which protects sewer gasses from being released into the living quarters. Unfortunately, this trapped water evaporates over time and it starts to emit a sewer smell.

To save money on pumps, to protect against flooding, and to ensure the drain has water in it, always make sure the drain is visible and keep it accessible.

POWER UP SPLIT SYSTEM A/C UNITS FOR 24 HRS. BEFORE BEING USED

Over winter, it is advisable to power down your air conditioning unit to prevent it from being accidentally activated in cold temperatures. Your condenser can be damaged and this is usually the most expensive part to replace. This can be done at the main electrical panel in your home, or at a switch box, usually positioned on a wall close to the outside part of the A/C unit. In spring, turn the power on a full day before you actually need air conditioning. This gives the unit time to adjust and to evaporate any moisture that may have gathered over winter in the coils.

One more thing, "is it best to cover the A/C unit in winter" or just cover the top? Answer: If there is power to the unit all year (the power is not shut off in winter) there is a small amount of electricity moving through the compressor in the outdoor unit. This creates heat and leads to condensation on the outside of the condenser (how ironic). Also, trapped warm air inside the "tent" can cause rust problems, and it makes a great place for mice and other crawlies to spend the winter out of the snow and wind. I say, leave off the fancy cover and just put a piece of plywood on the top of the unit to keep falling ice off the surface. And turn off the power!

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF "A HOME INSPECTOR"

A few weeks ago I was asked to do an inspection on a property that had been vacant since last summer. We had to postpone this inspection after the selling realtor went to the home and noted that there was no water, and the home was cold. It seems that the owner, who is now lives elsewhere, had the gas furnace turned off. After all, it was 30° C when he moved. Unfortunately, the home did not sell in summer as hoped, and in fact, its possible that no one was in the home until winter.

This home was so cold, the pipes were frozen. Luckily, there didn't seem to be any broken pipes - at least none of the pipes that were visible inside the home.

One's first instinct is to turn the heat on and let the pipes thaw. Good idea, but unfortunately, this is not all. The main water **MUST** be turned **OFF** as well. After a few days of heating the home, it would be reasonable to turn the water **ON** once again. But, **DON'T LEAVE** the home unattended. Water pipes inside walls which might have been frozen and split, could start a slow leak. Someone must monitor the home for a few hours and check all the taps, toilets, water heater, and "P" traps.

This particular unit was a mobile home and the only serious water problems were found under the unit, where heat tape should have saved the piping but didn't. Apparently this heat tape was not plugged in or simply not working. The owner was lucky, in that only a few pipes were frozen and they were quickly and easily repaired... at the owners expense of course. Not happy!

It was very obvious that this home had not been winterized properly. This usually means turning the heat to low (or off), draining the water lines and heater tank, shutting off the water and adding proper anti-freeze to the toilet tank & basin and sink traps. Unfortunately, this does not lend itself to good selling practice, nor does it help an inspector perform his tasks. If you are the listing agent, always ensure that the gas and power are turned on. The main water valve can be turned off.



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