



MARCH 2009 NEWSLETTER

WET BASEMENTS

The words “Wet Basement” are all-too-familiar to many homeowners. It is said that more than 98% of all houses have had, or will have, basement leakage at some point, especially in Northeast Ohio.

The presence of efflorescence, a whitish mineral deposit on the interior of foundation walls, indicates moisture penetration. It should be noted that the severity of the problem, or whether the problem is active, is not indicated by the amount of efflorescence. Other clues are rusty nails in baseboards, rotted wood near floor level, rusted metal feet on appliances, mold and mildew, lifted floor tiles, storage on skids, peeling paint and the presence of dehumidifiers.



Poor surface drainage is one of the main causes of basement leaks. The ground should slope away from the house a rate of one inch per foot for at least the first six feet. As a preventative measure, seal where the driveway and sidewalk meet the foundation walls. If downspouts are ever suspected of being disconnected, broken or clogged below ground level, they should be redirected to discharge above grade at least six feet away from the house. Gutters should be kept clear of debris.

Localized low areas including basement stairwells, window wells, etc., may allow water to collect. Drains should be provided in the bottom of these. Where there are no drains, plastic dome covers over the window wells allow light into the basement while minimizing water and snow accumulation.

In the vast majority of cases, basement leakage is not significant from a structural point of view and can be controlled relatively inexpensively. However, the presence of foundation cracks, damaged perimeter drainage tiles, a high water table or underground streams may call for more extreme corrective measures. These measures are used when chronic flooding occurs.

Excavating, dampproofing and installing drainage tiles should be used as a last resort. Because excavating on the exterior is expensive (\$8,000 - \$15,000 typically), an alternative is an interior drainage system. The cost of this approach is one-third to one-quarter the cost of exterior work. There are many cases where this proves satisfactory, although this must be judged on a case by case basis.



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FINALIZING ESCROW QUICKLY

Make sure your client understands the importance of a having a home inspection while the house is in escrow. To ensure a smooth, successful professional inspection, the seller should be advised to:

1. Leave the premises. The homeowner should allow the real estate agent to show the home to the inspector and prospective buyer. The inspection will take at least two hours, depending on the size and age of the home.

2. Be polite. The inspector is not the seller's enemy. The inspector's role is not to find reasons for the buyer to cancel the transaction: It's to offer all parties a fair assessment of the property. So the seller should always treat the inspector professionally. Remind the seller to respect the inspector's time by calling to set up another appointment if access to the property won't be possible at the scheduled time.

3. Don't argue during the inspection. A homeowner who is present during the inspection should not trail along behind the inspector and real estate agent. After the report is written, there will be time to respond to the inspector's findings.

4. Don't make statements based on guesswork. Real estate deals are major financial transactions. A seller who does not know the answer to an inspector's question, should say so.

5. Grant all-access. To do an efficient job, the inspector needs to have access to all the living areas of the home. If a seller does not allow an inspector into a particular area, the restriction will be noted in the inspection report. Which will surely raise potential buyers' suspicions.

6. Make agreed-upon repairs promptly. Your client may be asked to make repairs based upon the results of the inspection report. Advise your client to do so promptly. After all, the more quickly the repairs are made, the sooner the contingency will be met and the deal can be finalized. Why delay the closing of escrow?



ASK THE INSPECTOR

I have noted your Certifications; do you identify problems, and why they exist, in your Home Inspections?

Erick's Response:

Yes! Our inspectors are experienced Builders and Renovators who genuinely enjoy helping people, and this includes introducing them to their new home.

Clients (and REALTORS!) may often feel overwhelmed when they see a list of issues identified by a Home Inspector. Part of our service to the client is to prioritize these concerns, explain how they came to be, and present some affordable options for fixing them and estimate real-world repair costs. Additionally, our website includes a list of resources to further educate about home maintenance, home systems and safety.

Today, many people enter into the (largely unregulated) Home Inspection business with the idea that they are supposed to be Structural Engineers or Code Enforcement Officers. The fact is, a Certified Home Inspector will prioritize concerns relating to safety and function, be able to communicate effectively, and educate everyone concerned (buyer, seller, and REALTOR) in the process.