

Red Flags for Home Buyers

Sellers don't always tell the whole truth to potential homebuyers, especially if they're eager to sell. But you can not afford to get a professional inspection of every house you tour. So before you spring for the pro, narrow down your choices by doing your own pre-inspection to spot potential problems.

Mediocre Maintenance Three layers of roofing and gutters with plants growing in them are signs the owners aren't big on maintaining their home. What else did they neglect?



Foundation Failures Check out the yard grading. If the yard slopes towards the house, it could cause water to run down the foundation walls or into the basement, which will be costly to repair. Scour the foundation for damage. Bulges or cracks bigger than 1/3 inch can mean the house has serious structural issues.

Bad Smells Take a big whiff of the air inside and outside the house. Do you smell anything funky? If you can't smell anything but the huge baskets of potpourri all over the house, this could be a red flag.

Faulty or Old Wiring While you're probably not an electrician, make sure all the switches and outlets in the house function properly. Flickering lights, circuits that don't work and warm or hot outlets or faceplates are all symptoms of wiring problems

Fresh Paint... on One Wall New paint can really spruce up drab walls, but it can also hide bigger problems, like water damage, mildew or mold. If the room smells strange or if you see stains or saggy walls or ceilings, have an inspector look for mold and leaks.

Locked Doors and Blockades Ask about any rooms that are "off limits" during your home tour, and arrange to see them later if you're interested in the house.

Foggy or Non-Functioning Windows Check for water in between double-pane windows and make sure all the windows are functional.

Structural Walls or Floors Have Been Removed Sure you love the open floor plan, but was the house always open or did the homeowners renovate? If they removed a load-bearing wall without adjusting the framing, it can shift weight to other parts of the house. Hire a structural engineer if you think any renovations are questionable.

Bugs! No one wants a house with a pest problem -- be it roaches, mice or worst of all, termites. Be on the lookout for unwelcome creatures as you tour the house. Even if no foes pop out while you're there, consider a separate termite inspection if you're thinking of purchasing the property

BOTTOM LINE: Always get a professional inspection. Yeah, it's a little expensive, but it's worth every penny. Don't kid yourself: skipping a home inspection is not a good way to cut home buying costs. You'll end up paying more in the long run when problems inevitably arise.

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Benefits of Reducing Attic Heat

When selling a house, the last thing a Realtor® wants is for shingles to be falling off and/or disintegrating right before the buyers' eyes! This tragedy doesn't have to occur, with the right planning and a little know-how.

It is important to understand that excessive heat build-up in the attic of a home can cause its roof shingles to deteriorate. Some home inspectors will tell you that the best way to prevent this is to install an electric attic fan, with a thermostat that activates the fan when temperatures rise to a certain point.



Although this is one alternative, there is a **cheaper, simpler way** to lengthen the life of a roof. Adding two or more heat-driven turbine vents near the roof's ridgeline can work just as effectively. You've probably seen such vents on the roofs of commercial buildings. They can be used on the average home's roof as well. They work quite simply. When the attic gets too warm, the air rises, causing the turbines to spin and expel the hot air from the attic. Unlike attic fans, turbine vents require **no maintenance** and will **not raise electric costs**.

ELECTRICAL Shock Safety

April showers may bring May flowers, but they also bring wet basements and crawl spaces. When these conditions exist, the risk of electrical shock is high because electrically powered tools such as shop-vacs and portable pumps, are sometimes used to clean up. The combination of electricity and damp surroundings can be fatal if a defect in a tool or its wiring caused electricity to flow into the user's body.

To protect yourself from possible electrocution, make sure all power tools are plugged into a working ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). A GFCI is a sensitive switching device that monitors current flowing in an electrical circuit. If the GFCI detects a current leak that could cause a shock, it instantly interrupts or shuts off the electrical current to tools or other devices plugged into it.



For more information about GFCIs, check with your local home-improvement center or contact a qualified electrician.



ASK THE INSPECTOR

What is the small, round valve attached to the hose bibs on newer homes?

Erick's Response:

This small valve is an anti-siphon device called an "atmospheric vacuum breaker" that prevents cross connections from occurring when homeowners leave their garden hoses in a puddle of water, a bucket or in the radiator of a car, or anywhere else that water could be siphoned back into the clean water system. This could be caused by back-siphoning, back suction, back pressure; all of which can be caused either by water main breaks or when fire hydrants are opened on the street or within the neighborhood, thereby causing these conditions. With these devices attached, it prevents any water from being siphoned back into the hose; it breaks the suction activity completely, thereby preventing contamination of the clean water system.

In 2000, the Plumbing Code was changed, requiring all new homes to have this device installed on exterior hose bibs. Home Inspectors should advise all of their buyers / clients to install these devices on the homes that they are considering purchasing. The anti-siphon device costs less than \$5.00 and can be purchased in any local hardware store.