

Priority Maintenance for New Homeowners

There are so many home maintenance and repair items that are important; it can be confusing trying to establish which are the most critical. To simplify things, we have compiled a short list of our favorites. These are by no means all-inclusive, nor do they replace any of the information in a home inspection report. They should, however, help you get started on the right foot. Remember, any items marked as priority or safety issues on your home inspection report need immediate attention.

One-Time Tasks

- G Install smoke detectors as necessary (usually one on each level of the home, near any sleeping areas). Install carbon monoxide detectors, according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- G Make any electrical improvements recommended in the home inspection report.



- G Remove any wood/soil contact to prevent rot and insect damage.
- G Change the locks on all doors. Use a dead bolt for better security and to minimize insurance costs.
- G Correct trip hazards such as broken or uneven walks and driveways, loose or torn carpet or uneven flooring.

- G Correct unsafe stairways and landings. (Railings missing, loose, too low, et cetera.)
- G Have all chimneys inspected before operating any of these appliances.
- G Locate and mark the shut-offs for the heating, electrical and plumbing systems and label the circuits in electrical panels.
- G If there is a septic system, have the tank pumped and inspected and check local health department rules.
- G If there is a well, set up a regular testing procedure for checking water quality.

Regular Maintenance Items

- G Clean the gutters in the spring and fall.
- G Check for damaged roofing and flashing materials twice a year.
- G Clean the tracks on horizontal sliding windows annually, and ensure the drain holes are clear.
- G Test GFCI circuits, CO and smoke detectors using the test button, monthly.
- G Service furnace or boiler yearly.
- G Check furnace filters, humidifiers and electronic air cleaners monthly.
- G Check the bathtub and shower caulking monthly and improve promptly as needed.
- G Shut off outdoor water faucets in the fall.
- G Check reversing mechanism on garage door opener monthly.
- G Check attics for evidence of leaks and condensation and make sure vents are not obstructed, at least twice a year.

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Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters

The outlets with the colored "Test" and "Reset" buttons are specially designed to better protect people than ordinary outlets. GFCI's have been used in houses since the 1970's.

Why Are They Used?

GFCI's are designed to shut power off if there is a very small leak of electricity (a ground fault) which ordinary outlets wouldn't notice. Normal outlets are shut off by a fuse or breaker if more than 15 amps flows. This prevents fires, but since people can be killed by 1 amp or less, fuses may not protect people from shock. GFCI's shut off power if a leak as small as .005 amp occurs. With a GFCI, the little leak would be detected and the power would be shut off.

Where Are They Used?

GFCI's are now required by code for outdoor outlets, bathroom outlets, kitchen outlets within six feet of the sink and whirlpool outlets. Electrical systems for swimming pools are also GFCI protected.

Can They Be Added To Older Houses?

Yes, GFCI's can be added to any electrical system. They are more expensive than regular outlets (\$15-\$20 vs. \$1-\$2), but are inexpensive insurance. While they do not replace grounding systems exactly, some codes do allow GFCI's in lieu of grounding in some cases. It is safe to say that a circuit protected by a GFCI is better protected than one without.



HOME INSPECTION NIGHTMARES!

This is an unaltered (I swear) photo of a "freshly remodeled bathroom" found on a recent inspection. Finding a window in a shower stall is fairly common in old homes. The outlet in the shower is not so common but it might come in handy if the in-laws overstay their welcome. What I found completely unacceptable is the toilet paper dispenser in the shower; nothing good could come of that!

courtesy of the ASHI Reporter



ASK THE INSPECTOR

Should I report the lack of GFCI's as a safety concern?

Erick's Response:

Unsafe is defined in the Standards as a condition in a readily accessible, installed system or component which is judged to be a significant risk of personal injury during normal day-to-day use. A properly wired outlet without a GFCI does not fall into this category.

Is it safer to have an outlet by water or in damp areas wired with a GFCI? Of course it is. Your inspection report should highlight outlets that would require GFCIs today and recommend upgrades at the earliest convenience. Calling these out as a safety issue will trigger the buyer to demand that these outlets be replaced, but the local code inspector will not enforce this. Proper communication is always key.



Happy Halloween!