



Home inspections before you buy

Before approving financing, some lenders require you to hire a qualified home inspector to go over the inside and outside of the house you want to buy. They do this to ensure there are no major structural flaws that will threaten the security of their investment.

It's a precaution prospective buyers should take whether their lending institution insists on an inspection or not. One of the most important aspects of purchasing a home is knowing the condition of the property in advance.

As a buyer, sometimes it is difficult to put emotions aside and really see what kind of shape a place is in. You may notice the worn carpet, the leaky faucets and the torn wallpaper. But how many prospective buyers crawl under the foundation or into the attic, or climb onto the roof? Even those who do may not have the training to uncover structural flaws and maintenance problems that can result in costly repair work.

A home inspection before you purchase, gives you the security of knowing what to expect. And it enables you to make a more informed decision about the value of the home and any future costs. Since most home buyers don't want the expense of a home inspection for every home they consider, a good rule is to add a conditional clause to the offer to purchase, making it subject to a satisfactory inspection.

Ask your Realtor or lawyer for the names of reputable home inspectors. In Ontario, the most reliable indicator of a home inspectors qualifications is membership in the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors (OAHI), the Provincial Association of Certified Home Inspectors (PACHI) and/or the Canadian Association of Home Inspectors (CAHI).

Interview a number of home inspectors or inspection companies before you begin house hunting so you know who to call when you need them. Find out how long they've been in business. Ask for references and proof of membership in professional associations, what the inspection will cover and if there is any guarantee. Find out what the inspection will cost. Although fees vary, most inspections cost between \$200 and \$400. When compared to the cost of a house, this is a small charge for an objective appraisal and your peace of mind.

What's included

A professional building inspector will examine the building and within a few days, give you a written opinion on its condition and the approximate cost of repairs that may be required. The older the building the more potential problems. But new homes can also have serious problems. The inspector will look at all key parts of the home, such as the roof, siding, foundations, basement, flooring, walls, drainage, electrical, heating, plumbing, and so on. They will also look for wood rot, mold and insects.

Older homes should also be examined for lead paint, aluminum wiring asbestos, urea formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI) and termites, since the presence of any of these may affect the appraised value of the home.

Most home inspections usually last about three hours. A prospective buyer should accompany the inspector during the process since this will give them first hand knowledge of any problems that are identified. It is not the role of the inspector to evaluate a home's purchase price or general property value. Also, your home inspection will not replace the appraisal that your mortgage institution may require for mortgage financing.

Newer homes

Just because a home was recently built doesn't mean that it is free of flaws. The quality of construction can vary from builder to builder and sometimes mistakes do happen. Even if the home you want to buy is still under warranty, it pays to have an inspector find the problems before you move in.

Inspecting a home is no different than having a mechanic inspect a used vehicle. If it makes sense to check out a car, it makes sense to check out a house worth many times more.