

Ten tips to help you prepare for a home inspection

By Erin K. Witt

A home inspection is an objective visual examination of the physical structure and systems of a home, from the roof to the foundation. According to the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), a standard home inspection should assess the condition of a home's heating system, central air conditioning system, interior plumbing, electrical systems, roof, attic, visible insulation, walls, ceilings, floors, windows, doors, foundation, and basement.

Many inspection reports are filled with the same neglected maintenance items that are prevalent in many homes. To move your home sale along to a faster and easier closing, you can assist the process with the following tips. Most of these items can be accomplished with little or no cost, and can help you receive an efficient and professional inspection, while increasing the possibility of a more favorable inspection report.

Tip #1: Clean out dirty gutters and debris from roof. For clogged downspouts, try using barbecue tongs to reach in and remove leaves, or dig out larger pieces of debris and flush downspouts out with a garden hose. Repair loose gutter nails, and look for missing and cracked caulk around vents and chimneys, or any loose items that may need to be refastened. Also be on the lookout for small piles of sand around gutters. When a tarpaper roof starts to go bad, the small grains of sand stuck to the paper start to fall off and flow down. When enough grains have fallen off that bare patches are evident, it's time for a new roof.

Tip #2: Divert all water away from the house. This should include downspouts, sump pump discharge, condensation drain, etc. This is also a good time to clean out basement entry drains.

Tip #3: Clean or replace HVAC filter. Installing a new furnace filter at least annually improves the efficiency of your furnace and your home's air quality. It is also a good idea to have your furnace serviced by a qualified professional before the inspection. They can make sure the thermostat and pilot light work properly, and that the pipe bringing fuel to your furnace isn't leaking or loose. A professional cleaning and inspection can increase the efficiency and life of the furnace—and a well-maintained unit uses 10 percent to 15 percent less energy.

Tip #4: Remove grade or mulch from contact with siding (preferable 6-8 inches of clearance). At the same time, be sure to clear mulch, overgrowth and weeds away from outdoor air conditioning units—if the necessary airflow is blocked, the air conditioner will not be able to operate properly and could even suffer an expensive failure.

Tip #5: Paint all weathered exterior wood and caulk around trim, chimneys, windows and doors. Also paint and repair rusty exterior fixtures. Paint additives are now available to help paint stick to rust, while also neutralizing the rust and stopping corrosion from continuing under the paint. If left untreated, rust will eventually cause fixtures to lock up.

Tip #6: Make sure all windows and doors are in proper operating condition. Heat and humidity can cause wooden windows and doors to swell and stick. To repair a sticky door or window, first mark where it is sticking. Then, remove the door or window, and carefully remove any excess material with a hand plane. For sliding windows, the surrounding trim is often the culprit. Usually, it must be removed and reinstalled to allow for greater movement. To keep windows and doors from sticking in the first place, make sure that they are sealed with a good coat of paint, including the tops and bottoms. Be careful not to paint the channels where windows need to slide, though—instead, use a light coat of linseed oil as a sealer.

Tip #7: Clean lint from the entire clothes dryer vent system. It should be removed from the dryer to the exterior vent cap. Because lint is incredibly flammable, this common build up can create a fire hazard. And if a gas clothes dryer is not properly vented, it can even force deadly carbon monoxide back into the home.

Tip #8: Make sure plumbing is in proper working order. Repair leaks—a single dripping hot water faucet can waste 212 gallons of water a month, Pacific Gas and Electric reports. That not only increases water bills, but also increases the gas or electric bill for heating the water. Also be on the lookout for slow flushing toilets. Because toilets dump a lot of water down waste lines quickly, they are usually the first to exhibit signs that there is a clog or trouble with a septic system. If other drains are slow too, you can be sure that it is the whole system that is not working properly and not just one cranky fixture. An untreated clog can become a big, smelly mess—and an expensive repair.

Tip #9: Caulk exterior joints around all windows and doors, and all other exterior wall penetrations. Forty-six percent of a home's energy is lost around glazed areas in windows and doors. Caulking helps keep the house weather-tight and reduces heating and air conditioning bills. It can also help keep insects and vermin out of the house.

Tip #10: Provide clear access to the attic, crawlspace, heat systems, garage and other areas that will need to be inspected.
