

# IS YOUR HOME PHYSICALLY FIT?

Most Canadians take better care of their car than they do the home they live in.

According to a survey by the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors (CAHPI), “overall poor maintenance” was rated as one of the five problems most frequently found during pre-purchase inspections for home buyers.

Yet just as cars need regular oil changes and tune-ups to run smoothly and prevent major engine problems, so do houses need periodic preventive maintenance.

Conscientious preventive maintenance preserves the cosmetic, structural, and mechanical integrity of the home, and minimizes costly repairs for the homeowner. It also enhances the financial value of the home as an investment. Real estate agents agree that well-maintained homes sell more quickly and at higher prices than poorly maintained ones.

Nevertheless, many homeowners feel unqualified to determine what needs to be done. Few have the technical knowledge and experience needed to discern significant clues and to correctly interpret them. They may therefore miss important warning signs or, on the other hand, over-react to what is merely a cosmetic flaw. As a result, routine maintenance tends to get postponed or neglected - until it's too late. “A great many homeowners end up using home repair contractors and spending a great deal of money to correct problems which could easily have been avoided,” say CAHPI home inspectors.

## **Get Professional Advice**

When the list of maintenance chores gets out of hand, or when one doesn't know where to begin, it's time to call in a professional home inspector. Trained and experienced in the visual examination and evaluation of the condition of a home's major structural and mechanical components, the home inspector can help a homeowner focus attention on the tasks which need to be performed in order to bring a home into top shape.

While examining the attic, for example, an inspector might detect subtle evidence of water penetration through the roof. Taking into consideration the age and condition of the roofing material, he would then be able to recommend the need for either the installation of a new roof or perhaps some simple flashing repairs. In either case, serious water damage to the house can be avoided.

Similarly, an inspector's recommendation to install a power vent in the attic (\$150-\$200) in order to reduce the heat load might well double the lifespan of a shingle roof (\$2,000-\$3,000).

If a home has aluminum wiring, periodic preventive maintenance inspections are critical to monitor the condition of wire connections at outlets and switches and to take corrective measures if necessary. An inspector will note plumbing leaks and aging water heaters and indicate whether there is a need for repair or replacement to prevent inopportune failure or flooding. Improperly graded soil around the house, the most common cause of water in the basement/crawl space, would also be marked for correction.

## **Be Realistic**

The CAHPI cautions homeowners not to attempt to do all the maintenance chores themselves, especially items like electrical or roof top work. “Today, with our busy lifestyles, it is important to be realistic about whether or not one has the time, not to mention the ability and the tools, to perform all the necessary tasks.”

“We recommend that individuals first decide what they think they can accomplish themselves and then hire professional contractors to do the rest. This is the most efficient way of ensuring that preventive maintenance is actually carried out.”

How often should a comprehensive maintenance inspection be performed? CAHPI recommends a schedule of once every two to five years to keep a home in good physical condition. Individual house components, such as heating, air conditioning, and septic systems for example, require annual or semi-annual inspections and servicing by qualified tradesmen or service technicians.

“Intervals of 15 and 20 years are also important, because that is the lifespan of many of a home’s systems and materials, such as furnaces and roofing materials. Homeowners can anticipate some heavy maintenance work at those times.”

### **Choose Wisely**

“On-site professional advice for preventive home maintenance is a relatively new concept for homeowners,” says the CAHPI.

The advantage of consulting a professional home inspector on maintenance tasks and repairs is the assurance that the advice will be objective. Members of the CAHPI are not permitted to do any work on the homes they inspect, so homeowners can trust that the inspection is not being used as a means of soliciting unnecessary repair contracts.

For further information on home inspections, or to obtain the names of qualified home inspectors in your area, visit: [www.cahpi.ca](http://www.cahpi.ca) - and link to the website applicable to your province.