

# **PRE-PURCHASE HOME INSPECTIONS: A BUYER'S "PRIMARY EDUCATION"**

For a growing number of people buying homes today, the pre-purchase home inspection has become an accepted and essential part of the sales transaction. The professional home inspector, who understands the inner workings of residential construction, offers consumers an expert opinion regarding the condition of a home's major systems and components before the purchase is made.

Yet more and more the home inspection is also being appreciated for its educational value to the home buyer. Many people are moving into their first house, for example, and are inexperienced in the "care and feeding" of a home. Another growing segment of buyers, looking for a tax break as well as a place to live, is single women. Very often, however, they too are unfamiliar with home maintenance.

For these and other consumers, the home inspection provides an excellent opportunity to learn how a house "works", where its various systems are located, and how to live comfortably in their particular new home. This is the main reason a buyer should accompany his or her inspector on the inspection itself, according to the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors (CAHPI).

Among the first important things to learn, according to CAHPI inspectors, are the locations of the gas and water lines. In the event of an emergency, or if there is remodelling to be done, it is essential to know where these utility lines enter the house and how to shut them off. It is equally critical to know the location of the electric and heat emergency switches.

It is also very important to get a basic understanding of the electrical wiring of the new home, and its capacity. A home inspector can explain the operations of the fuses or circuit breakers, and evaluate whether the existing wiring is adequate to carry the home's electrical load.

In addition, a private home contains many major components not found in apartments, and which might intimidate the first time home owner. These may include the central air conditioning and/or heating systems, a water heater, attic fans, humidifiers, septic systems, and the like. Even though many people call in professional tradesmen to handle major repairs, some knowledge of these components is necessary for routine maintenance and troubleshooting, and competently discussing repair work with contractors.

In several areas of the country, wet basements or cellars are a chronic and serious problem. By following the home inspector on his inspection tour, a buyer can learn and discuss the likely causes of water penetration as well as the best methods for solving the problem.

Home buyers must also remember to have their prospective purchase inspected even if it is brand new. It is the independent home inspector who works for and reports to the home buyer on all items not completed, or not done in a good workmanlike manner, etc. before closing date. Due to rising labour and material costs, some builders have used shortcuts and inferior products, which can lead to problems later on.

Of course, a trip with the inspector is designed to illustrate the positive aspects of a home as well as the negative. There may be some features - such as a crack in the basement wall - which might scare the first-time home buyer into turning down an otherwise satisfactory home. By voicing concerns to the inspector personally, the buyer may learn that such fears are unwarranted. Cracks, for example, are often simply the result of shrinkage or minor settlement.

An education, however, is only as good as the teacher who provides it, and so the Canadian Association of Home

& Property Inspectors (CAHPI) cautions buyers to be selective in their search for a home inspector. The CAHPI is at the leading edge of the North American profession and is the first and largest self-regulating professional home inspection organization. It is recognized by government groups and other professional organizations for the high standards it has set for its home inspectors and for its commitment to following a strict Code of Ethics.

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