

# WHAT HOME BUYERS WANT TO KNOW IN TODAY'S MARKET

## The Most Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

The real estate market has toned down dramatically since the 80's, yet these days there are clear signs of renewed home buyer activity. Home inspectors have reported a significant pick-up in pre-purchase inspections, according to the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors (CAHPI). And with mortgage rates at affordable lows, the expectation is that we are headed for a busy home buying season.

### **What are today's home buyers most interested in knowing about their prospective purchase?**

Location, style, and size are always the primary issues, but buyers today are placing an increasing emphasis on learning about the condition of the home and the financial impact that it will have.

"It's probably a combination of the recession and heightened consumer awareness, but what the buyers really want is an assurance that the major systems and components of the house are functioning as they should be. It's not like it was years ago, when you could count on soaring equity to cover the cost of any repair or improvement expenses. Today every dollar has to be accounted for," say the inspectors of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors.

A professional pre-purchase home inspection, which reveals the physical condition of the property and which identifies items that will need repair or replacement, has become routine in most parts of the country. Nevertheless, there are still sections where the service is not well known.

### **What are the most common house problems buyers can expect to find?**

In existing homes, 20 years and older, the CAHPI experts say that roof shingles, electrical wiring, and surface water drainage systems are the items most commonly cited on inspection reports as needing repair or modification. In new construction, inspectors frequently find water seepage into the basement/cellar or crawl space, inadequate attic ventilation, poor roof construction, and substandard masonry and finish work.

### **Are there any environmental hazards present in the home?**

In response to a growing awareness of the dangers posed by certain substances, such as radon gas, asbestos fibre, and urea formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI), many consumers are paying extra to have special tests performed to make sure their new home doesn't pose a health hazard to them and their family. Although a standard CAHPI home inspection does not include environmental items, many home inspectors offer environmental assessment as an optional service, or recommend further evaluation.

### **What is the difference between a home inspection and an engineering inspection?**

Which is appropriate for the home buyer? Considerable confusion surrounds this question, particularly since in some areas, home inspections have been inadvertently referred to as engineering inspections or evaluations, and engineers sometimes perform home inspections. But the two, according to home inspection and engineering authorities, are actually quite different.

Engineering evaluations are usually specialized by discipline (such as chemical, structural, electrical), and involve exhaustive scientific measurements and calculations to confirm the design of the systems. Home inspections, on the other hand, tell buyers what they really need to know: what is the condition of the home today? The home

inspection, performed by a professional engineer (P.Eng.) or a non-engineer professional inspector, does not involve engineering analysis of the original design, but deals instead with the in-service operation or failure of a home's systems and components, as well as the type of maintenance that has been and should be performed. It is based on established criteria of performance and technical training specific to the home inspection profession.

### **How does one know who is qualified to conduct home inspections?**

Provincial agencies, which are typically responsible for regulating professional activity, have not undertaken to license home inspectors. Home buyers must therefore carefully review an inspector's background and credentials to determine if he has the appropriate training and professional ethics to perform home inspections. The CAHPI advises that home owners would do well to inquire whether an inspector is a member of a professional home inspector's association, as it is the most reliable indication of an inspector's qualifications. They can then check with the association as to a member's credentials. Membership in CAHPI require members to meet stringent professional and experience requirements.

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.