

Inspection standards needed — now

After years of consultations and reviews, the B.C. government should finally act on this vital issue for home buyers

Maybe, at last — at long last — Victoria is moving to protect consumers considering the biggest buy of their lives, the purchase of a house or property in British Columbia.

The Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors of British Columbia CAHPI (BC) has led the charge to rid the province of charlatans and unqualified house inspectors by asking the government to put in place standards for the house and property inspection industry.

The purpose of a home inspection is to provide the consumer with a better understanding of the property conditions and to minimize the risk to the consumer's investment, because no one wants to face serious, unexpected costs shortly after a purchase. More and more people — along with an increasing number of lending institutions — have come to rely on a home inspection because more information equals a more informed purchase decision, which equals fewer surprises.

It is a unique discipline, distinct from construction, engineering, architecture or municipal building inspection, and as such requires its own set of professional guidelines and qualifications.

Over the past two years, dozens of municipalities and B.C. chambers of commerce have written to Premier Gordon Campbell asking his government to put in place professional qualifications to ensure B.C. house inspectors are trained and qualified. *The Vancouver Sun* has called for this same action on its editorial pages.

In March, Forest Minister Rich Coleman, who is the minister in charge of housing, responded to a CBC Radio feature on the B.C. real estate industry by saying government was prepared to act. Coleman told the *Early Edition* that government was aware there are no provincial requirements for certification of house inspectors, was aware that anyone can call himself a house inspector in B.C., and agreed that this made it difficult for consumers to know whether the person they're relying on is competent. He assured listen-



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ers that plans were in motion to protect homebuyers and government would take action before the end of the year.

Turns out the action the minister was referring to was the handing of the file over to yet another ministry — Solicitor-General and Public Safety — for more consultations and review. This makes it five years of consultations and reviews by the B.C. government.

Since Coleman's remarks, the premier has heard from even more B.C. municipalities — including Langley, Coquitlam, Pemberton, Greenwood, Lake Country, Elkford, Langford, Ladysmith, Ucluelet, Duncan, Esquimalt, Port Edward, Highlands and Alert Bay — requesting that he put standards in place for house inspectors. As Esquimalt Mayor Chris Clement wrote in an April 10 letter from council to the premier, "Standards for home inspectors should be regulated, mandatory, and enforced."

So municipal governments and chambers of commerce — in touch with their residents and in tune with their needs — have been acting to protect consumers. For the B.C. government, the heavy lifting has been done and a certification model for house inspectors has been produced, one that is already being called the best in the world.

Seven years ago, CAHPI (BC) realized that national standards, as well as provincial standards, were required to protect consumers. So CAHPI, the Construction Sector Council, the Alliance of Canadian Building Officials' Associations, first Nations, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. built the National Certification



Standard for Canada's home and property inspection industry and municipal building officials. CAHPI has been chosen to oversee this national initiative, with its national standards of competency, certification and accreditation for private inspectors. This national initiative is now underway, attracting international attention, including various U.S. states looking to see how they can adopt the same model for their own use.

Which means that B.C. doesn't have to re-invent the wheel, or create new red tape or new layers of regulation. It

simply has to adopt the national certification model, customize it for B.C.'s situation, and then B.C. consumers will finally have the protection they need and deserve.

CAHPI (BC) is proud of this work, and proud that CAHPI has been chosen to oversee the certification process in Canada. We fully expect that if the Campbell government does finally act to protect consumers, the B.C. standards will be modelled on the national standards.

We'll bring in our members from across B.C. and Canada who developed

the National Certification Program so that the B.C. effort gets off to a fast and productive start.

We need to make the National Certification Standard work for B.C.'s unique needs. Let's start giving B.C. consumers the protection they need when they need it the most — when they're about to make the largest purchase of their lives, and seek the help of a qualified home inspector to help them make an informed decision.

Bill Sutherland is president of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors of B.C.