

American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI)

LIST OF 10 MOST FREQUENT HOUSE CONDITIONS

Everything looks prettier in the spring, and so, traditionally, home sales shift into high gear just about the same time as the daffodils start to bloom. But homebuyers should be careful not to be taken in by a pretty face in the form of a fresh coat of paint or a new azalea bush. Since no home is perfect, homebuyers would be wise to learn where and how to look beyond the cosmetics for possible signs of problems with their prospective purchase. Failure to do so before they buy could mean any number of unpleasant surprises after the move. Experts recommend hiring and accompanying a professional home inspector on a pre-purchase examination of the home's structural and mechanical condition. While this won't guarantee a perfect home or even that problems won't develop sometime in the future, it will greatly reduce the risk, and it will provide a valuable education in the process.

A recent survey of its members, the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI) compiled a list of the most frequently found problems in homes. It is significant that within this list of ten problem categories, at least four are directly related to the damaging effects of water. Apparently, keeping water out, after a home is built, is the homeowner's most important and continually challenging task.

It should be noted that this list represents a national average. Regional climates, building codes and the age of a home played a significant role in the ASHI findings.

1. Improper Surface Grading/Drainage

This was by far the most frequently found problem as reported by (35.8%) of home inspectors surveyed. It is responsible for the most common of household maladies: water penetration of the basement or crawlspace. The most effective remedies for wet basements include regrading the ground away from the house and repairing or installing a new system of roof gutters and downspouts.

2. Improper Electrical Wiring

A significant number (19.9%) chose this item as the most common home defect, which includes such situations as insufficient electrical service to the house, inadequate overload protection, and amateur, often dangerous, wiring connections. Some home inspectors say that 70-80% of the electrical wiring they see is done wrong, and that most of it is attributable to do-it-yourselfers. This is a serious safety hazard, not just a cosmetic defect.

3. Roof Damage

Although reported by only (8.5%) of the respondents as the most common problem, roof leakage, caused by old or damaged shingles or improper flashing, was considered by ASHI members to be a frequent problem. Shingle repairs can be easily and inexpensively done, but shingles near the end of their useful life may mean a major re-roofing expense.

4. Heating System

Problems in this category include broken or malfunctioning operation controls, blocked chimneys, and unsafe exhaust disposal. These conditions represent more than simply inefficient heating; they are health and safety hazards. Heating systems should be serviced and maintained annually by a professional, according to the manufacturer's instructions.

5. Poor Overall Maintenance

Even the novice home buyer is usually aware of this situation, demonstrated by such signs as cracked, peeling, or dirty painted surfaces: crumbling masonry; makeshift wiring or plumbing; and broken fixtures or appliances are common issues faced by home inspectors. Although some of these problems may seem cosmetic than serious, they affect the overall lack of care which has been given to the home. Often these are clues to more serious problems or needed repairs.

6. Structural Problems

As a result of problems in one or more of the other categories, many houses sustain damage to such structural components as foundation walls, floor joist, rafters, and window and door components.

7. Plumbing

Though not ranked by any respondents as the most significant problem, plumbing defects still rank high among the house problems encountered, and include the existence of old or incompatible piping materials, as well as faulty fixtures and waste lines.

8. Exteriors

Flaws in a home's exterior, including windows, doors, and wall surfaces, are responsible for the discomfort of water and air penetration, but rarely have structural significance. Inadequate caulking or weather-stripping are the most common culprits,

9. Poor Ventilation

Perhaps due to overly ambitious efforts to save energy, many homeowners have "over-sealed" their homes, resulting in excessive interior moisture. This can cause rotting and premature failure of both structural and non-structural elements. Poor ventilation can cause what it referred to as a "sick house".

10. Miscellaneous

This category includes primarily interior components, often cosmetic in nature, which were not found frequently enough to rank individually in our survey.