

Ten Most Frequent House Problems

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Since no home is perfect, home buyers 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. A pre-purchase examination of the home's structural and mechanical condition can help you to objectively evaluate your purchase and official price. 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. In the most recent survey of its members, the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI) compiled a list of the most frequent found problems in homes. It is that within this list of the most frequently found problems in homes. It is that within this list of ten problems categories, at least four are directly related to the damaging effect of water. Apparently, keeping water out, after a home is built, is the home owner'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, reported by 35.8% of the 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 including regarding the ground away from the house and repairing or installing a new 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 said that 70% to 80% of the electrical wiring they see is done incorrectly, and that most of it is attributable to do-it-yourselfers. This could be serious safety hazard, not just a cosmetic defect.

3. Roof Damage

Although reported by only 8.5% of the home inspectors 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 life span may mean a major re-roofing expense.

4. Heating Systems

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

5. Poor overall Maintenance

Americans take better care of their cars than they do their homes, say home inspectors, who often come across cracked, peeling, or dirty painted surfaces, crumbling masonry, makeshift wiring or plumbing, and broken fixtures or appliances. Although some of these problems may seem more cosmetic than serious, they reflect the overall lack of care which has been given to the home and deferred maintenance.

6. Structurally Related Problems

As a result of problems in one or more of the other categories, many houses sustain some, although usually not serious, damage or structural components such as foundation walls, floor joists, rafters, or window and door headers.

7. Plumbing

Though never ranking by the home inspectors as a number one problem, plumbing defects still ranked high among the house problems encountered, and included the existence of old or incompatible piping materials, as well as faulty fixtures and waste lines. Surprisingly, some home inspectors reported finding natural gas leaks in one of three homes inspected.

8. Exteriors

Flaws in a home's exterior, including windows, doors, and wall surfaces, are responsible for the discomfort caused by water and air penetration, but they rarely have structural significance. Inadequate caulking and/or weatherstripping are the most common culprits.

9. Poor Ventilation

Perhaps due to overly ambitious efforts to save energy, many home owners have "over-sealed" their homes, resulting in excessive interior moisture. This can cause premature failure of both structural and non-structural elements. It can also lead to tremendous mold accumulation, which often causes allergic reactions.

10. Miscellaneous

This category included various interior components, such as sticky windows or dripping faucets, as well as a number of environmental concerns, such as lead-based paint asbestos.