



Understanding Home Inspection Reports

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When shopping for a home inspector most buyers' initial question will be "how much"? However, a much better question would be "what does your inspection cover and what type of report format do you provide"?

ROOFING, FLASHINGS AND CHIMNEYS													
REFERENCE	DEPTH	DESCRIPTION							HEIGHT	OTHER	SLOPE	SLOPE	
		Roof	Shale	Clay	Concrete	Asphalt	Flt	Flt					
1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10	1.11	1.12	1.13	1.14
Main Slope	✓												
Second													
Third													
Main Flat													
Second													
(Downs)													
Bay(s)													
Porch(es)													
Detached Garage	✓												

IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS											
Reference	Roof Inspection By	Roof Inspection Limited	Prevented By	Roofing	Flashings	Chimneys	Deck	Location	Time	NONE AT PRESENT	
1.0	ROOFING - 1.13 Vulnerable Areas, 1.14 Ice Dams, 1.15 Tree Branches										
	Main Slope - old damage, patched, cracked, curled, missing, rot, leak							R	N	1:50 - 100	
	Second - old damage, patched, cracked, curled, missing, rot, leak										
	Third - old damage, patched, cracked, curled, missing, rot, leak										
	Main Flat - old damage, patched, cracked, curled, missing, rot, leak							H	SE		
	Detached Garage - old damage, patched, cracked, curled, missing, rot, leak										

There are many styles of reports used by home inspectors, including the checklist (pictured left), narrative style and custom computer generated (pictured right) which normally is a narrative style. Many home inspectors are still using carbonless forms while other will use photocopied forms. I have seen reports done on notepad paper. Some reports are delivered on site and some may take as long as 4 - 6 days for delivery. All reporting systems have pros and cons. My preference is a custom computer generated narrative style report.

The most important issue with an inspection report is the descriptions given for each item or component. The home inspector knows what he/she is talking about but will the report adequately explain that after he/she is gone? A report, which indicates the condition as "Good," "Fair" or "Poor" without a detailed explanation, is vague and can be easily misinterpreted. An example of a vague condition would be: "Stove - Condition - Poor."

After the fact one would wonder what is wrong with the stove? Does it need replacement or repair? A narrative good report should supply you with *descriptive* information on the condition of the site and home. An example of a descriptive condition is: "Stove - Condition - Minor wear, Left rear burner damaged, rust stains, chips in enamel finish. Recommend Having Serviced." As you can see, this narrative description includes a recommendation for repair. Narrative reports without recommendations for repairing deficient items may be difficult to comprehend.

Many home inspectors are now using digital cameras. A good report will incorporate these pictures directly into the report and using the example above would have pictures of the damaged stove. This is especially valuable for clients who can't attend the inspection and when realtors are negotiating for the repair or allowance.

At the end of the inspection your inspector may provide a summary with a question and answer period. Use this opportunity to ask questions regarding terms or conditions that you may not be familiar with. A good inspector should be able to explain the answers to your questions in a way you can understand. If for some reason a question cannot be answered at the time of the inspection, the inspector should research the question and obtain the answer for you.

For instance, if the inspector's report states that the concrete foundation has common cracks, be sure to ask, "Why are they common?" The answer you should receive will be along these lines: common cracks are less than 1/8" and are usually due to normal concrete curing, shrinkage or expansive soil. The inspector's knowledge and experience is how the size and characteristics of the cracking is determined.

We recommend that you accompany your inspector through the entire inspection if possible. Some inspector will discourage you from attend the whole inspection as it will slow them down. This is true, but my feeling is that if I were spending several hundred thousand dollars, I would want to know the home intimately before buying. This knowledge helps you to understand the condition of the home and the details of the report.

Take the time and become familiar with your report. The more information provided about the site and home, the easier to understand the overall condition. Don't be afraid to call the inspector and ask questions. Don't select your home inspection company just on price. Look at the service they deliver and the final product, the inspection report! After all, a home purchase is one of the largest investments you will ever make!

Additional information for new homebuyers can be found at WWW.PacCrestInspections.com
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