

Know Your Home's Warning Signs

Prepared by Realtor® Laurie Erb
With Marty Dommer, Certified Home Inspector

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When selling your home, one of the first questions that arises in the minds of the prospective buyers is, "What's wrong with this house?" They may not ask you, but they certainly will ask their Realtor or home inspector.

To protect your bargaining position and identify in advance any problems that might affect the sale of your home, you need to develop a basic understanding of problems that most commonly arise. In a recent survey of its members, the American Society of Home Inspectors listed the following problems to watch out for.

Water

One of the most common problems is water damage. Usually this comes as a result of improper grading, a leaky roof, poor roof drainage system or faulty plumbing. An inspector will check your property for ground sloping toward the home that might result in water in the basement or crawl space. He or she will also check for past evidence of water damage—mildew, water stains on the wood, buckled paneling, peeling paint and other telltale signs.

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Please feel free to call me if you would like further explanation on any of these topics, or if you have any real estate questions at all. I simply see my mission as striving to be as helpful as I possibly can to Denver Metro homeowners. I would also be happy to refer you to Marty Dommer, 773-6102, a Certified Home Inspector, who will be happy to answer any questions you may have. I hope this booklet provides the information you need to get your home "market ready".

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One final note: If you're not practicing preventive maintenance, then start now. Correct your existing problems then follow a maintenance schedule that keeps everything in good condition.

For more information about what warning signs to look for and what to do about them, feel free to call me. My experience in selling homes has taught me the difference between situations that can kill a sale and defects that are just signs of a home that's seen good living. I can help you determine how best to alleviate problems that might interfere with a sale.

Cracks

As a house settles, the movement can result in cracking that isn't really indicative of any problems. Some cracks are obviously cosmetic and can easily be fixed with a coat of paint or new plaster. But others—in the foundation or chimney, for example—might indicate a bigger problem. If you're not sure which you've got, have a structural engineer take a look before—not after—scaring off potential buyers.

Electrical Wiring

Buyers expect safe and adequate electrical systems. Fused electrical panels are obsolete, and often over-fused (a fire hazard). They are also not acceptable to many insurance companies, so plan on replacing them. If you suspect your main panel is more than 25 years old or less than 100 amps, need for repair or replacement is likely. If you've performed do-it-yourself electrical repair work in the past that's of questionable quality, it's time to bring in a professional.

Roof

Hail damage is not always evident from the ground. If your neighbors got new roofs after a hail storm and you didn't, then check for damage. Also look for cupping, curling, or granule loss (black soots) from the ground. If any of these conditions exists, your roof covering may need replacement. If you know of any leaks, a roofer should repair them.

Water Pressure

Inadequate water pressure is often a sign of corroded pipes or blockages in older homes. Inspectors will flush toilets and turn on taps simultaneously to check pressure. Try the same test yourself. If the water flow drops substantially, you may have a pressure problem.

Heating

Even though your heat system may be heating your home adequately, it may not be doing so safely, and this is often not evident to a non-expert. If your heat system is over 10 years old, when was it last safety checked? There can be hidden problems such as a cracked heat exchanger or back-drafting flues.

Quite often, however, problems are relatively minor and involve nothing more than fixing a thermostat, replacing a filter, or taking care of minor gas leaks. Keep in mind that furnaces or boilers are scrutinized very carefully by inspectors, and buyers expect a heating system to be operating safely with lots of usable life left in the system.

Ventilation

Proper air circulation is a prerequisite for a healthy home. Excessive condensation on windows in winter is one indication there may be a problem. Make sure exhaust fans in your bathrooms and kitchen work, and check to see if attic openings are clear. They should be open year-round.

Safety

Many, if not most safety problems in homes are the result of do-it-yourself modifications—such as electrical or heating systems. Unless you really know what you are doing, call a professional, or you may be devaluing your house or possibly causing a serious safety concern. Asbestos is also a concern to many buyers and to the EPA. If you have any, is it in good condition and/or properly contained? Radon and lead paint can also become issues. Be aware of your options.

