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INSPECTING ROOFS

Basement problems formerly were the most significant area of contention with regard to home inspectors. Since home inspectors have become better educated and more experienced, basement complaints against home inspectors seem to have diminished.

One area that seems to be a real source of controversy is roof inspections. Many home inspectors do not go up on a roof. This makes sense if the roof is steep or high. It is also dangerous to go up on roofs during the wintertime. However, when a home inspector does not go up on the roof, it can create an impression that the roof was not properly inspected. This is especially true if later on other people, such as roofers or other inspectors, do go up on the roof and find substantial defects.

Another important point is the inspection of the rood by means of the attic. Home inspectors do not always crawl up into the attic, particularly if they are fairly tight. Sometimes a home inspector will poke his head up through a scuttle and shine a flashlight around. Again, this can create problems later on if a roofer or subsequent inspector does go up in the attic and finds water stains, a deterioration or even cracked rafters or trusses.

Oftentimes home inspectors will make a comment that there are one or two layers of shingles on the roof. Later it may be determined that there are three, four or five bad layers of shingles, even if they are only in certain areas. This can make an inspector look bad.

Patching or improper flashing should be an indicator that there were problems in the past. Many inspectors don't pay a lot of attention to patching or flashing issues if they don't notice any water leakage. However, if a new homebuyer experiences water leakage shortly after purchasing the house; he or she may complain that there was evidence of prior problems or repairs that was not brought to their attention.

Water stains inside a house are often dismissed as old or not evidence of an ongoing problem. However, if shortly after a homebuyer purchases the house and the homebuyer

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experiences leakage in the area where the water stains are, he or she may feel that they were misled by the home inspector.

One real source of controversy is when the home inspector predicts the useful life of a roof. Wisconsin Statutes do not require home inspectors to predict or anticipate the useful life of any component of the house. A home inspector may say that the roof has a useful life of three to five years. If shortly after moving into the house, the homeowner is told to replace the roof immediately, he or she will be upset.

Compare these two descriptions of the same roof and decide for yourself which one creates liability for the home inspector.

1. "This roof is reaching the end of expected life. The interior shows evidence of leakage. There are areas of patching on the roof that were done in an attempt to prevent further leakage. The roof has multiple layers of shingles."

Now read this paragraph.

2. "The roof has three to five years of life expectancy. There are old stains in the interior indicating that the roof was successfully repaired. Some tar around the vents. The roof has two layers of shingles. The roof appears to be sound at this time."

What happens if the roof must be immediately repaired by the buyer because of ongoing leakage and it turns out the roof has three layers of shingles? Which home inspector is in trouble?