



Winston-Salem Regional Association of REALTORS[®], Inc.

From The Home Inspector: January 2014

2013 WSRAR Home Inspection Committee

Co-Chairs: Andy Hilton and Bob Merritt

The WSRAR Home Inspection Committee meetings are an excellent way to learn more about the home inspection process and to learn more about homes in general. The Home Inspection page on the WSRAR website (www.wsrar.com) contains all past newsletter articles; these are an excellent source of information. If you would like to join the Home Inspection Committee in 2014, please complete a Committee Preference Sheet today. You won't be disappointed!

Below is a brief snapshot of issues the committee discussed in 2013:

- Does composite decking material warp? Not exactly. It does “erupt” if not spaced properly so that it can expand when wet. This type of material lasts longer than wood but not forever. (The National Homebuilders website <http://www.nahb.org/> lists the average life expectancy of many home components.)
- It is better to use non-toxic melting compounds than salt when treating ice; salt can damage certain surfaces.
- The committee discussed mold, which is more precisely called “fungal growth” until it has been tested and results confirm that it is mold. Home inspectors are less interested in naming types of mold, but prefer instead to seek the source of moisture that supports mold growth and prescribe a remedy.
- Where can you find good information about asbestos removal? Check the NC Department of Natural Resources portal.ncdenr.org/web/guest/ and/or EPA <http://www.epa.gov/websites>.
- It can be difficult for REALTORS[®] and inspectors alike to identify what type of heating or cooling source is in a home. Verbiage on labels can be misleading or confusing. For example, heat pumps are sometimes labeled as air conditioners, and vice versa. Home Inspectors operate both cooling (except in cold weather) and heating systems to determine their design. You can call the Gemaire Co. with the model name and serial number; they can identify what type of unit it is. (336-777-1390).
- For honeybees that choose to nest in or close to a home, people should try calling a honeybee expert first and asking if they will consider relocating the bees. If that is not possible, a pest control expert should be consulted. For mosquitoes, there are some effective home methods (spray bottle filled with Listerine, citrus, Alka-Seltzer and others). Pest control experts can be consulted for professional results.
- Due to the large amount of rainfall this year homeowners are experiencing issues such as: condensation in crawl spaces, fungal growth, increased pest activity, wood damage and foundation leaks. With drier weather these problems fade, but homeowners should always practice good water management with priority attention to gutter, downspout and ground water drainage issues. Interior moisture issues should be addressed as well. Vent-less combustion appliances like unvented gas logs and gas ranges give off huge quantities of moisture that can lead to fungal growth, wood damage and corrosion of electrical wires.
- The committee discussed the causes of foundation cracks. Keeping in mind that houses are built using reasonable structural standards and are expected to settle as they age, one should expect cracks. But uneven settlement and serious cracking is aided by over-wetting the soil next to the foundation, unstable footings, soil pressure against the foundation and sometimes tree roots.
- Basement and crawl space waterproofing systems often work well and many installers guarantee their work. Sealants painted on foundation walls have limited effectiveness. Any documents or certifications should be retained by owners indefinitely.

- In this era of increased efficiency of cooling and heating equipment, sometimes AC and heat pump units get mismatched to their air handlers. HVAC contractors have manufacturers' guidelines for replacing components. Mismatched units can cause significant issues such as excessive moisture and inefficient operation.
- The committee discussed "Masonite," or more precisely "hardboard siding." Like all wood products, hardboard expands and is inclined to rot when wet. But hardboard swells, and its composite structure breaks apart, making it easier for water to enter. The secret to maintaining durable hardboard is getting its surface and edges fully caulked & painted to seal out water as soon as it's installed.
- Home inspectors are not required to perform Code inspections; but if they do mention Code violations, they must cite specific verbiage in the Building Codes to support their comments.
- Photoelectric smoke detectors have been found to be more effective than ionization smoke detectors in alarming during smoldering fires. Ionization detectors are the ones now installed in most homes. All smoke detectors need replacement after 10 years
- Both smoke and carbon monoxide detectors should be placed high on the wall or on the ceiling where warmed air gathers. In Winston-Salem all homes must have smoke detectors in bedrooms and at every level where people gather (Housing Code requirement). New homes must have interconnected smoke detectors, plus CO detectors if there is a combustion appliance or attached garage. (For Davie, Davidson, Yadkin and surrounding counties please check with the county's inspection department.)
- Defective gas water heaters are one of the most common sources of carbon monoxide intoxication. Placement of the heater in the attic can reduce this danger but water heaters in attics are less efficient and could cause substantial damage if there are leaks.
- Tankless water heaters, while not a continual drain on power, do draw a large amount of power when warm or hot water is used. These types of water heaters can be a good choice for households with limited water demands (such as single person households.)
- Gas piping using corrugated stainless steel tubing (CSST) has safety concerns. It is vulnerable to arcing damage then leakage of gas during lightning storms. A good resource is www.csstsafety.com. This product should be bonded/grounded to the electric service. Repairs are usually not expensive.

Special guest David Brown, Brown Termite and Pest Control, answered members' questions about pest issues:

- The most common snake in our area is the black snake. It provides excellent rodent control but if homeowners decide to call a pest control expert to remove it, the snake's movements should be monitored so the homeowner can direct the pest control technician to its location when he/she arrives. Mothballs and other chemical snake repellents are only effective when used in a small, confined area.
- Houses on slabs can be more prone to insect infestations than homes on crawl spaces or basements. Homeowners should seal gaps and holes to reduce insects.
- Mammal removal (including opossums, raccoons and bats) should be done by pest control experts due to federal and local laws, rabies concerns, and injury risk.
- All mulch attracts insects, including termites, to a home because it creates a moist environment. There should be a reasonably sized gap between all mulch and the foundation of the home.
- Copperhead snakes and black widow spiders are the two most common venomous pests in our area but there is no significant danger if immediate medical assistance is sought.
- Ants are the number one pest in the Winston Salem area. Homeowners may wish to consult a pest control expert because until the nest is eliminated, repeat infestations are likely.
- Skinks and other lizards are not a danger to the home's structure and can provide excellent insect control.
- Termite baiting systems can be expensive but they are effective and a good choice for homeowners wanting to reduce chemical exposure to a very small area.