



Winston-Salem Regional Association of REALTORS® , Inc. From The Home Inspector: January 2015

2014 WSRAR Home Inspection Committee Activities and Discussions

Co-Chairs: Marcia Barney, REALTOR® and Jeff Payne, Home Inspector

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 of the WSRAR website (<http://www.wsrar.com/member-resources/home-inspection/>) contains all past newsletter articles. Below is a snapshot of issues the committee discussed in 2014:

Danny Gough (Energy Solutions, 336-463-2005) discussed the impact a **professionally designed and properly installed HVAC system** has on human comfort:

- On average, people spend 90% of their time indoors and 70% of their time in their homes so the comfort level in the home has a profound impact on emotional and physical health.
- It is important for both the builder and the HVAC representative to be invested in providing optimal home comfort.
- The HVAC representative should ask questions about the home's intended use (will the occupants open windows often, are they willing to adjust clothing and/or comfort expectations to save money on utilities, etc.) and evaluate all of the home's components (type, number and placement of windows, home exposure, amount and quality of insulation, etc.) before recommending a unit.
- If brokers suspect units are mismatched, they should note the serial numbers and call an HVAC technician. Mismatched units impact efficiency. Permits must be in place before the home is sold.
- The quality of a terminal impacts efficiency.
- Bigger units are not always better.
- Proper size and design of the register/diffuser is important in order to send air to the ceiling; registers need to be different sizes for different rooms.

Jay Lawson (Progress Environmental, 336-722-9999) discussed **underground storage tanks and fungal growth**:

- North Carolina does not require underground storage tank ("UST") closure or removal unless there has been a leak.
- In-place closure is less intrusive but removal is, of course, a definitive way to address the issue and may prevent delays or issues with a future real estate transaction. In addition to buyer preference, lenders and/or insurers may have specific requirements regarding USTs.
- USTs must be empty prior to closure or removal.
- The N.C. trust fund only reimburses costs to evaluate, test and remove the contaminated soil, not fluid removal, closure, or tank removal. Reimbursement can take as long as 8 – 12 months. The applicant must be the current or past owner of the property. There is a \$1,000 - \$2,000 deductible.
- There is no requirement to test the soil after all remediation is complete but this is wise.

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- If the soil is contaminated beyond a depth appropriate for removal, a deed restriction will state the soil cannot be disturbed and groundwater cannot be used for human consumption if soils are contaminated.
- The procedures are similar for dealing with a leaking above ground storage tank however, the trust fund does not cover these types of tanks.
- Carin Kromm with the local NCDENR office is a good resource for Underground Storage Tank questions: 336-771-5340.
- Fungal growth is similar to pollen: every individual will react differently but extreme reactions are not common. The CDC website has good information: www.cdc.gov/mold/ . There are no established state or federal permissible exposure limits for mold.
- Fungal growth is indicative of water intrusion and/or elevated humidity levels. Those issues must be addressed before the mold is eliminated.
- Testing to determine the extent of the problem is advised but the type of mold is typically not important. Indoor mold levels should be no higher than outside levels and the types of mold found indoors should not be different from the types of mold found nearby the exterior of the home.
- The mold should be removed following established industry guidelines carefully to completely eliminate it and prevent airborne spores. Following remediation, the homeowner may wish to remove or cover any mold stains and retest to be sure remediation was successful.
- Home inspectors will report the evidence of past or present fungal growth and any related moisture issues.

Civil Engineer Carl von Isenburg (GeoScience & Technology, P.A. 336-896-1300) discussed **structural issues:**

- Homebuilders only began reinforcing basement walls approximately 15 – 20 years ago therefore older homes may often have horizontal and stair step cracks. These may or may not represent a serious issue but sellers may wish to have a structural engineer perform an evaluation to reduce the likelihood of delays in the transaction.
- Vertical cracks may or may not represent a serious issue but should be evaluated especially if the crack is wider on the top than the bottom or vice versa.
- Addressing moisture issues (poor grading, downspouts, etc.) is critical to resolving or avoiding structural issues.
- Kevlar and carbon fiber are often used rather than steel now for aesthetic reasons.
- All structural repairs should be warranted for the life of the structure and also be transferrable. Repair technicians should be certified by the manufacturer of the products they install.

Bill Rouse, (REALTOR, 336-779-9200) and Andy Hilton (Hilton Home Inspection, Inc., 336-961-6809) discussed **fungal growth:**

- Bill noted the EPA's website is a good resource.
- Everyone reacts differently to different species and quantities of fungal growth.
- Vacant homes are often susceptible to fungal growth because decreased or absent air cooling and circulation may have increased the humidity in the home.
- Dehumidifiers can reduce fungal growth.
- Bleach is not an effective solution.
- Renovations, including increasing or changing the insulation, can impact air circulation and either increase or decrease fungal growth.
- Decreasing air exchange rates will improve heating and cooling efficiency but it often decreases air quality because the air is not being refreshed.

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- The presence of fungal growth should always be investigated further by a professional who sends the samples to a lab for identification.
- The person who remediates the fungal growth should not be the same person who investigated and identified it. Additional tests should be conducted after remediation to be sure it was successful.
- Home inspectors usually focus on the water intrusion issue that caused the fungal growth.
- Homeowners may wish to resolve any fungal growth issues prior to listing their home in order to avoid significant delays to the real estate transaction.

Dan Dockery and Alex Ellis (City of Winston-Salem Inspections Division, 336-727-2382) discussed **permits**:

- Dan encouraged everyone to call him at 336-727-2084 if they have any questions about permits.
- If the Inspections Department needs to evaluate a completed project for a permit, they will try to be as non-invasive as possible, unless an item could potentially pose a health or safety hazard.
- Dan reminded everyone it is always better to get permits for projects: it is less expensive in the long run, it will prevent problems if the homeowner decides to sell their home, it helps prevent insurance issues and it also provides the benefit of an expert's evaluation of the work that has been done.
- Members may call Dan if they want to report a potential violation of the minimum standard housing code. If home inspectors wish to report health and safety issues, they may call Dan for all areas except those within the Town of Kernersville (they have their own Inspections Department.)
- The city's online database will be upgraded soon so members will be able to do permit research.
- Dan reminded everyone that their Inspections Department cannot evaluate every item of a newly constructed or renovated residence due to their extensive work load. This underscores the importance of having a home inspector.
- In general terms, the following will require a permit: any structural work, most electrical work (with the exception of replacing outlets or lighting fixtures,) any plumbing work behind the wall and most mechanical work.

Jeff Payne (Payne Home Inspection & Analysis, 336-416-5237) discussed the featured topic of **radon**:

- Radon is a naturally occurring gas.
- Many factors determine the amount of radon in a home so the radon level may be entirely different between two homes side by side.
- Sealing cracks in basement floors and covering crawl space floors with plastic can reduce radon.
- Generally speaking 40 – 50% of all homes with basements have elevated radon levels, 30 – 40% of all homes with slabs have elevated levels and 20 – 25% of all homes with crawl spaces have elevated levels.
- Radon tests should be placed on the lowest level of the home that could be used regularly, whether finished or unfinished. Tests cannot be placed in some areas, like closets, hallways, crawl spaces or enclosed areas with high humidity and/or high air velocity.
- Although short term tests are often used to accelerate the real estate transaction, long term tests yield a more accurate result. Both tests may be used in the home simultaneously.
- Although 4.0 is generally accepted as the maximum radon level, the lower the number, the more likely air quality will be improved.
- The average radon level for Forsyth County is 3.2; nationally the average is 1.3. Generally speaking, 40% of all homes in Forsyth County have elevated radon levels.
- If the result is below 8.0, it may be wise to conduct another long term test prior to installing a radon mitigation system.

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- If a home has a mitigation system, it should be regularly tested for radon to be sure the system is still functioning correctly. The home should also be tested after any major remodeling has been done.
- Mitigation systems should always be vented to the roofline.
- Mitigation systems should be effective even in homes with very high levels of radon.
- Radon testers and mitigation system installers do not need to be certified so consumers should ask about training, guarantees/warranties and what happens if they install the system and the radon level is still high.
- The EPA's bulletin, "A Citizen's Guide to Radon" is very informative.

Angela Koons (Old Republic Home Warranty, 800-282-7131, ext. 1297) discussed the **relationship between home inspections and home warranties.**

- Angela discussed the items a home warranty does and does not cover.
- Coverage applies to the primary issue, not secondary damage.
- Angela recommended agents advise clients to fully research home warranties and read all material carefully.
- It was recommended buyers do one final walk-through before closing in case any conditions have changed since the home inspection.
- A "Walk-Thru Inspection Checklist" was provided.
- Home systems and appliances that are covered or not covered by home warranties were discussed.
- Home warranties do not cover "pre-existing conditions", only "undetectable pre-existing conditions" that meet the plan's criteria for the Buyer.

Open Discussion by the Home Inspections Committee included:

- If the repair request specifically states that a licensed professional must be used and the home owner does not use a licensed professional to make the repairs prior to Closing, this could be considered a Breach of Contract.
- Resolving issues related to mismatched or un-permitted HVAC systems can cause significant delays to the real estate transaction. Home inspectors typically note mismatched units on their reports due to the loss in energy efficiency (mismatched units can also impact warranties). Mismatched units should be evaluated by an HVAC expert. Each county handles the inspection and permitting of units differently.
- Home inspectors will typically test heating units in the summer but they typically do not test cooling units in the winters (an HVAC expert should evaluate the system).
- The committee discussed testing as many systems and fixtures as possible during the final walk-through.
- If a radon mitigation system is installed and the Buyers move into the home after the test, but before the final test results come back, they may be disappointed if the numbers are not as low as they would like. This highlights the importance of having a written guarantee that the mitigation system will reduce the number to a certain level (preferably below 3.0).
- Underground oil tanks continue to be an issue, especially now that they may have lending implications. To prevent delays to the real estate transaction, Sellers should resolve these issues prior to listing their home.

Two home inspection on-sites were held.

- May 13, 2014 - 1859 Underpass Road, Advance
- October 8, 2014 - 6197 Frye Bridge Road, Clemmons

The Home Inspectors hosted a **breakfast panel** on September 11, 2014 at Truliant FCU, "Everything You Want to Know About a Home Inspection," sponsored by Professional Inspection Associates.