



Home Inspection Services Newsletter

April, 2008

Educational Section: **Grandfathered Items**

What constitutes a Grandfathered item relative to home inspection findings? First a brief note about building codes.

National building codes & construction practices change typically every three years. Municipalities review the national codes (building, electrical, plumbing, etc.) and modify these codes for their particular geographic area (snow loads, earth quakes, high wind, etc. may or may not be a factor). Accordingly, codes vary by municipality and the dates of adoption vary as well.

The majority of home inspectors have a reasonable knowledge of IRC (International Residential codes) but few inspectors are code certified and none would be intimately familiar with code changes that may be adopted by the various municipalities. Accordingly, a home inspection is not a code compliant inspection and inspectors do not cite building codes in inspection reports.

The question of “grandfathered” items comes up when inspectors point out items that do not meet current standards. Examples include: GFCI circuit breakers, smoke detectors, two prong ungrounded electrical receptacles, anti-siphon devices, safety glass, fuses in electrical circuits, etc.

There is **no grandfather language** in the code books but it is understood that no municipal code compliance inspector will come to your home and require that the home be upgraded to current codes. So the issues is this: a home inspector points building practices and devices that would be considered not as safe as the current standard, the buyer decides that these are desired changes, the seller says “that’s the way it was built” and I’m not paying to have it changed. The home inspector is no longer involved; his job was just to point these things out. So, it’s a negotiation; an area where realtors show their value.

There are circumstances that are not as black and white including:

Kitchen & bath remodels where the electrical work was not brought to current standard, two prong electrical outlets that have been replaced with three prong (but still ungrounded) outlets, flex gas pipe in furnaces (if the gas is shut off at the meter, the gas company will not turn it back on until the pipe is changed).

Summary: Most of these issues are related to changes in building standards to make homes safer. Home inspectors point out many of these items allowing the buyer to make decisions appropriate to the next occupants circumstances.

Maintenance Item for April: Heat Pump/AC tune-up

(Each month, we select appropriate items so that over a 12 month period you are reminded to attend to most common household maintenance/inspection items.) HVAC contractors are not frantic this time of year which makes it a good time to have your AC unit or heat pump serviced. With the price of electricity going up again, servicing may save you \$\$\$. **The typical life for an AC compressor is 12 years.** Consider a **home warranty** with a company that will upgrade your unit to a 13 SEER in the event of failure.

Question of the Month: What's an Anti-Siphon Device?

Anti-siphon devices prevent "grey water" from being drawn into a municipality's potable water. Public water providers require that these inexpensive devices be installed on outside hose bibs; water feed piping to lawn sprinklers & drips, piping to swimming pool auto fill, dishwasher drain lines, etc. Most home inspectors report on the presence/absence of these devices (public safety issue).

Safety Tip of the Month: Attic Pull-down Ladders

Pull down ladders are frequently installed in garages. If the garage and home attics are not physically separated or fire blocked in between, these pull down assemblies compromise the fire separation between the garage and the home. Since a significant percentage of house fires start in the garage, fire wall separation between an attached garage and the home is a building safety code requirement. Attachment of a piece of sheet metal or fire rated sheet rock to the plywood cover will generally meet this requirement. Check with your local fire marshal for recommendations.

Inspection class for realtors: Arizona Academy of Real Estate (Bell and 99th Ave) offers a **3 credit hour course** "lowering risk through inspection". This course is taught by Mark Andrews (yours truly). I promise that it will be educational and fun! Contact the Academy for dates and details. Ph# 623 505 5380

Let our experience work for you!



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