



Home Inspection Services Newsletter

December, 2011

Lead Article: Sewer lateral

The **Sewer Lateral** is the underground piping that connects a homes waste system to the municipal sewer line. This piping is the responsibility of the home owner. Unfortunately, it is not visible and therefore not able to be inspected or (often times) positively identified by the home inspector. The test that I do is filling and draining sinks and tubs and observing the speed of the drainage. If drainage is slow (or blocked), we recommend further evaluation by a plumbing contractor. Our test is may point to problems with the drainage system or sewer lateral but cannot take the place of that of a plumbing contractor observing the underground pipe with a camera.

Why is this an important topic?

In the 1960s and prior, piping materials utilized for direct burial were not robust. Clay, Orangeburg (Fiber conduit), cement, and Cast Iron were utilized. All of these materials are subject to environmental degradation. Some are susceptible to tree root penetration and crushing. Typical life for these materials is 40 to 60 years. Pipe failure can be sudden and catastrophic or gradual (think of tree roots or pipe deformation). Newer piping is ABS plastic which is typically not subject to these failures if properly installed (there have been instances of manufacturer defects). Another issue is the installed **clean out (see picture)** for the underground waste pipe. The clean out is a vertical section of pipe (generally close to the home) that provides access to the underground sewer pipe. Older systems did not have clean outs. Access to the Lateral in that case is through a plumbing vent or a removed toilet and is much more difficult. We look for clean outs and note their presence (or absence) in the inspection report.

An older home with a clean out is generally a sign that the lateral has been replaced (or worked on and a clean out added). Replacement of sewer laterals requires a building permit (which the client can check on).

Recommendations: If you are purchasing an older property and the sewer lateral has not been replaced, it is prudent for you to have the pipes scoped by a plumbing contractor. This task typically costs \$200 to \$250 which is much less than the thousands of dollars to replace the pipe.

Monthly Question: What is a child safe electrical receptacle cover?

Instead of plastic plug inserts for electrical receptacles, there are spring loaded or **shutter system electrical receptacle wall plates**. These are “permanent” and do not interfere with plugging in a cord. The typical cost is around \$5.00 each but should come down as volume grows. These cover plates make an excellent gift to families with young children.

Maintenance Item for December: Yard Watering

Days are shorter and temperatures are cooler. This means that plants need watering less often. Depending on rain, most years I shut the sprinkler and drip system off for December, Jan, Feb, and March. If we go a month with no precipitation, I’ll set the timer to manual and water the plants that way.

Safety Tip: Holiday Lights

Manufacturers of the holiday lights attach a warning label advising the maximum number of light strings that should be plugged into each other (usually 3). Pay attention to this warning – it is there to prevent overheating and the possibility of a resultant fire. REMEMBER, these lights are **inexpensive**. Do not repair; splice wires, etc. for the same reason. Please be safe this holiday season.

Let our experience work for you!



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