



Inspectors needn't be repairmen

Inspector's in the House **BARRY STONE** Syndicated Columnist

Dear Barry: This is not a question as much as a comment. You occasionally discuss how home inspectors inspect gas-burning fixtures. In my opinion, home inspectors are not qualified to inspect gas appliances — period. Unless they hold the proper licenses to do actual work on those fixtures, they should not be inspecting water heaters, furnaces or other gas appliances. You would better serve your readers by advising them to use licensed contractors for inspections of gas-fueled equipment. That way, the person doing the inspection will have the necessary knowledge and the proper license to make educated evaluations and reliable recommendations.
— Jay

Dear Jay: If gas-burning fixtures should only be inspected by licensed plumbers and heating contractors, we will have to dismiss nearly all of the municipal building inspectors who inspect furnaces and water heaters on behalf of city, county and state building departments. Those building inspectors, the ones who give final approval for newly built homes, are code-certified, but very few are licensed plumbing or heating contractors.

Repair skills are not essential when searching for defects. A doctor need not be a surgeon to diagnose a disease. Likewise, a competent home inspector can identify mechanical problems without the expertise to repair them.

A qualified home inspector who inspects furnaces, for example, should be able to recognize inadequate fire clearances for furnaces and flue pipes, improper gas line connections, irregularities in the color and pattern of a gas flame, rust damage in burner chambers, visible cracks in heater exchangers, inadequate combustion air supply, back-drafting of combustion exhaust, and much more. In some cases, home inspectors have identified defects that were overlooked by the contractors and the gas company technicians who serviced the equipment.

Home inspectors who take their profession seriously participate in ongoing education in all aspects of real estate inspection, including the evaluation of gas fixtures. The annual education conferences offered by national and state home inspection associations typically include seminars whose instructors are licensed heating contractors or experts from major gas companies.

Contractor licensing is appropriate for those who install and repair gasburning fixtures, but it is not essential for those who inspect these systems for specific defects involving function and safety.

Dear Barry: Last week, while house shopping, I attended an open house. The agent said there had been a home inspection but refused to show a copy of the report. If an inspection report had been done, wasn't the agent obligated to make it available for viewing? — Ed

Dear Ed: If the sellers or their listing agent have a home inspection report for the property that is for sale, they would be foolish not to provide a copy to prospective buyers. Whether they are required to show a copy before the signing of a purchase contract is a matter that may vary from state to state. But refusing to show the report to prospective buyers is not a good way to build trust. In fact, it's downright bad salesmanship.

E-mail questions to questions@

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