



Preparing a Home for an Inspection

By Martin Newmark
303-554-5840
Copyright 11/ 2005

Any endeavor embarked upon benefits from proper preparation.

As a Realtor when you put a home on the market you likely do a lot of preparations to make the home presentable. You may have the windows washed, the home staged, or a new front door installed. These preparations make the home much more appealing to your prospective buyers from an aesthetic perspective and help you get the house under contract.

Once you've got the contract though the home still needs to be appealing from a functional perspective. This is where preparing a home for a home inspection comes in. What can you do to make the home inspection go more smoothly?

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Make sure there are light bulbs that work in every fixture. If an inspector finds a light that doesn't work with the flip of a switch he will simply mark it as a light that doesn't work. This means that it may be the bulb, or it may be an electrical problem. There is no way to know that changing the bulb will fix the problem without actually doing it. An inspector may have a bulb available for a simple change, but most inspectors won't disassemble a fixture to change a bulb. The simple solution is for the seller to go through the house and ensure that all light bulb sockets have a functioning light bulb in them.
2. Ensure access to items that will be inspected. Neither NAHI (National Association of Home Inspectors) nor ASHI (American Society of Home Inspectors) standards of practice require an inspector to move personal property in order to inspect any component of a home. Many of us will if little risk is involved, but in general please make access easy.
 - a. Attics: If the attic access is in a closet, remove contents from the closet. If in a garage, make sure the access hole is easily accessible.
 - b. Crawl space: If the crawl space portal is under a couch move the couch temporarily. If it's in the floor of a closet filled with personal belongings move the contents so that the portal is easily found and accessed.
 - c. Electrical panels: If the electrical panel is behind a picture remove it to a safe place until the inspection is over.
 - d. Windows and doors: Sometimes windows or doors have personal belongings stacked up against them so access is impossible. Ask the occupant to move items until the inspection is over. Windowsills may be lined with the occupant's fragile keepsakes, also making operation impossible. Ask the occupant to move these items for the inspection.
3. Ensure that all utilities are on. NAHI and ASHI standards of practice do not require an inspector to light pilot lights, turn on plumbing valves (other than normally operated faucets), or throw electrical circuit breakers. The reasons for this are generally for the safety of the inspector and of the home. If a furnace, water heater or gas fireplace pilot light is off when the inspector arrives, he will have no idea why it is off. It's perfectly reasonable for the inspector to assume that someone shut it off because there's a problem with the device. Many inspectors will report this condition without attempting to light the pilot. The same goes for plumbing. Many vacant properties are winterized, which entails turning off the water supply at the main and draining the pipes, water heater and toilets. When the plumbing is turned back on, if winterization was not done properly or seals in faucets have dried out, leakage may result. Most inspectors don't want to be liable for problems that occur when a system is activated and hence won't activate them. Before an inspection begins ensure that plumbing is on, pilot lights are lit and all systems are functional.

4. Remove pets from the home. Since inspectors may enter and exit the home several times during the course of an inspection it is best that any animal that the owner doesn't want outside be taken away from the home during the inspection. This is also true if the pets are in any way dangerous.
5. Ask the seller to find somewhere else to be during the inspection. It's a much more comfortable situation for the buyer, the buyers agent, and the inspector if the seller is not present during the inspection. The inspection period is often a great time for the buyer to get a better feel for what will hopefully be their new home.
6. Have the furnace cleaned and certified by an HVAC contractor. Your home inspector is a generalist, much like your family physician. If your doctor sees a problem that is out of the scope of her expertise she will refer you to a specialist like a dermatologist or cardiologist. The same goes for a home inspector. If your inspector sees a potential problem with a furnace, he will refer you to an HVAC specialist. It's usually less expensive to have a problem discovered and dealt with before a property is listed than after an inspection when it needs to be fixed in a hurry. Also, keep in mind that HVAC manufacturers and contractors recommend that a furnace be serviced every year. While every year may be excessive, most homeowners never have them serviced unless there is an obvious problem. A good rule of thumb is that if the HVAC system hasn't been serviced (cleaned, adjusted and the heat exchanger inspected) in the last 3 years, have it done before an inspector knocks at the door.

While none of these actions are required, taking one or all of them will ensure a smoother, less stressful and easier post-inspection process.

A seller-friendly version of this list may be found at: <http://AbacusInspection.com>.

For questions or comments contact Martin Newmark at Abacus Inspection Service. 303-554-5840.