

Inspection checklist for maintenance and repair

Some handy hints for homeowners and homebuyers on giving a house a quick checkup.

—Diagnosing House Problems.
A house is the most expensive investment most Canadians will make. To keep it from becoming even more expensive means giving it a regular checkup. It's a lot easier to spend 50 cents now on a new washer to fix that leaky shower head—before water soaks into the framework and turns into a torrent of repair bills.

This little guide will help you discover the symptoms and causes of common house problems. Although you may need a professional to help you uncover some of the hidden problems, anyone can make a thorough and quick examination. So roll up your sleeves, grab a flashlight and head for the basement.

Start in the basement. You can usually learn more about the condition of a house from the basement. A lot of problems start here and ripple their way up.

Foundation Walls

•Cracks in the wall are serious only if they are large and leak water. Small cracks are okay; they appear because concrete shrinks as it cures.

•Water stains are one of the tell-tale signs that water is seeping through the foundation. Damp spots, crumbling mortar, and white powdery deposits also betray the presence of water.

Structural Framework

•Twisted or sagging beams along the basement ceiling change the house's structure—and that means cracks in the walls, warped floors and even windows that stick. The most important part of your framework is the beam that runs down the centre of the basement ceiling. Use a builder's level to see if it is straight and level.

•Mold, fungus or rotted timbers weaken the house's foundation. If you suspect problems, poke the wood with a knife or screwdriver to see if there are any soft spots. Rotting wood is usually the result of leaking water or poor ventilation.

Electrical Wiring

•Exposed or bare wire in the basement will give you an idea of how good the wiring is in the rest of the house. If the insulation around the wiring is crumbling, the wires are exposed or bare, or wires have been connected by simply twisting them together, it's time to call an electrician.

•Blown fuses or circuit breaker shut-off require an electrician. The house is using too much electricity for the wiring to handle. If a fuse blows as soon as you replace it, there's a short somewhere. Unplug all the appliances and put in a new fuse. If the fuse blows, call an electrician. If it doesn't, try plugging in one appliance at a time to

see which causes the problem.

Plumbing

•Leaking require immediate repair. Water can rot cupboards and floor boards.

•Rust stains around pipe joints or low water pressure probably mean that a plumber should have a look.

Floors

•Sagging or warped floors are usually signs that the supports under the floor aren't good enough. In some houses, a load bearing wall may have been removed from the floor below. In newer, houses, it may simply be that the house is settling.

•Squeaking floors aren't a structural or safety problem. They're just annoying. The squeaks are usually the result of poor nailing.

Walls

•Cracks on the interior side of outside walls can lead to serious damage. Rotted wood siding, stained metal or vinyl surfaces and crumbling mortar may be caused by moisture from the inside of the house creeping through cracks in the wall or around windows.

Ceilings

•Bulging, warped or sloped ceilings may mean that the floors above are bulging, warped or sloped.

•Stains usually mean that water is seeping onto the ceiling. Leaking pipes and poor sealing around sinks and bathtubs are the common causes.

Kitchen and bathroom

•Damaged ceilings, floors or walls are the typical problems because these rooms generate so much moisture. The damage can be severe if moisture penetrates the framework.

•Frosted windows or sweating toilets mean that you don't have enough ventilation. Opening a window or using a dehumidifier will help for the short term, but you'll have to install an exhaust fan.

Attic

•Water stains tell you that the roof leaks. Water soaks the insulation, making it less effective, and can stain ceilings below.

Other Things to Check

•Condensation is becoming a common problem. Because of heating costs, many people mistakenly believe that houses should be sealed tightly—so fresh air can't get in to dry up moisture. Misty windows and damp spots on walls and ceilings mean too much moisture and can lead to serious and expensive structural damage.

•Insects and rodents are a nuisance and a potential health hazard, but they can also damage a house. Sawdust around structural beams may indicate termites. If you think wood is infested,

poke around with a knife or screwdriver. Infested wood is spongy or almost hollow. If you discover infestation, call an exterminator. Holes, frayed insulation on electrical wire and leaking pipes may also mean that you are sharing your home with rats, mice or squirrels. Plug up any holes where you think rodents might enter, and

destroy nests that you find. If you use poison, follow the directions on the package exactly.

Prescribing Solutions

If you discover that the house has a few problems, don't panic. The problems are common, and their repairs are standard.

If you want to diagnose small

house problems before they become big problems, you can get CMHC's Homeowner's & Homebuyers's Inspection Checklist for \$1. The booklet shows you how to make a quick and thorough check, pointing out symptoms, causes and cures. A dollar's worth of prevention can save you thousands of dollars for the cure.



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