



5 "RED FLAGS" FOR HOME BUYERS

It's a great day here in Orem, Utah! My lovely wife Shelly approached me with the idea to create a quick list of "Red Flags" for a buyer to refer to when they visit their list of prospective homes they are thinking of buy. I think that Shelly came up with a great idea, so here are 5 "Red Flag" biggies you can pass on.

#1-STAINS ON THE CEILING - While falling in love with the interior of the home and looking up at the light fixtures, prospective buyers should pay particular attention to the ceilings in all of the rooms. They should look closely for stains and cracks that might be indicators of leaks and/or structural movement. If they are identified before making an offer, the buyer can ask the seller for details before making the offer. After hearing the seller's explanation the buyer can decide on the plausibility of the seller's explanation. The home inspector can then be alerted about the staining and be on the lookout for water entry and movement evidences.



#2- STAINS AROUND THE TOILET BASES - Leaking toilet bases are very common in residential structures. When toilets are installed, they cannot be over tightened or it can fracture the toilet base. Nobody ever warns the owners to re-tighten the toilet base after a month of use. As a result, the toilet can be easily shifted and break a gap in the wax ring seal. What's a "wax ring seal" you ask? Well, it's the part that your toilet sits on and if it is loose, sewage water can leak around the toilet base and it allows water to pass through to the subfloor and cause damage, mold, and rot. Pretty gross, but unfortunately, pretty common. I recommend that buyers look closely around the toilet base for signs of subfloor swelling or flooring discoloration. As a water entry expert, I use a non-invasive moisture meter around the base of every toilet to identify leaking conditions that have not yet become visible to the naked eye (or that have been "staged" to cover up any potential signs).



#3- STAINS ON THE OUTSIDE WALLS OF THE HOME - Water drip stains and cracks on the exterior of the home are often visible signs of water entry and unseen damage. I recommend that home buyers walk around the outside of their prospective house during the daylight hours and look for water drip staining. This is most visible on stucco and brick exteriors, but it is also visible on vinyl, wood, and composite-sided homes. It is usually related to multi-level roofs that terminate against vertical walls, and below chimney-to-roof joints. Please visit www.Kickout.info to see the damages related to missing roof flashings called the kickout flashing.





#3- STAINS ON THE OUTSIDE WALLS - continued – Kickout flashings were commonly omitted on most Utah homes up until about 2 years ago. Look closely for any and all stains and cracks and then ask the seller about any past exterior cracks, leaks, or repairs. Identifying the full extent of damage goes beyond the scope of a normal home inspection and requires a water entry and stucco expert like myself. This specialized inspection needs to be performed on homes where you can visibly see these signs of water entry to determine the scope of the damage so that it can be dealt with before you buy the home.



#4- FILTHY FURNACE - This may sound odd, but I recommend to prospective buyers that they remove the



covers on the furnace and see what condition the unit is in on the inside. If there are cobwebs, dust, soot or major rusting, then perhaps the buyer can add the repair/replacement of the furnace on the list of contingencies in the initial real estate purchase contract. Furnaces can range anywhere from \$1,200 to \$4,000 plus installation, and therefore home



buyers need to do everything that they can to ensure that they are protecting themselves from buying a home with a furnace unit that is ready to fail.

#5- POOR EXTERIOR DRAINAGE - Walk around the exterior of

the home while maintaining a distance of about 10 feet away from the foundation. Look at the earth between you and the foundation. Ideally the earth at the foundation should be about 6" higher (or more) than where you are standing. This promotes surface water drainage away from the foundation. Unfortunately, about 95% of the homes I inspect have areas that are either level or much lower and surface water is drawn towards the foundation. The collecting water will then search for hairline cracks in the foundation and draw water inside the home. This results in damage, mold, rot and is also a big attractor for subterranean termites. This condition can be easily corrected when it is identified, yet most Utah homeowners are oblivious to the negative grading issue.



Using this quick reference “Red Flag” list, it is our hope that home buyers will be able to avoid wasting their time on homes with huge issues. Avoiding major issues saves negotiation time, appraisal fees, inspection fees, and allows the home buyer to better find their diamond in the rough. Once they do, then they can invest in the professional inspection services of Michael Leavitt & Co Inspections, Inc. to help validate their original purchase decision by revealing the true conditions of the property.

Michael Leavitt is the owner of MLC Inspections, Inc. (www.TheHomeInspector.com) and he is serving as the current national Chairman of the American Institute of Inspectors, which is a non-profit trade association for the inspection industry (www.Inspection.org).