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Homeowner's Inspection Checklist

This practical, easy-to-follow checklist for homeowners will help you identify common house problems and deal with them. In it, you will find how-to tips offering effective solutions for every room of your house.

Let's Begin Outside

Check Your House's Curb Appeal

How does your house look from the street? That is where prospective buyers will be when they first see your home; and, that is where they will form that all-important first impression. Stand at the curb in front of your house and note what you see.

- Remove any clutter in your yard.
- Repair cracked or uneven driveway or walkway surfaces.
- If your lawn has bald spots, apply some top dressing and re-seed. Prune trees and shrubs of dead wood. Weed and mulch flower beds, if you have them. If it is the right time of year, consider buying some flower-filled planters to enhance the eye appeal of your property. Make sure your lawn is mowed regularly. Ensure that the composter area is tidy.
- Are your windows and walls clean?
- Does your front door need paint?
- Ensure your eaves and downspouts are clear of debris and in good repair.
- Are your backyard deck and walkways clean? If not, use a power washer and do any necessary painting, staining or sealing.
- If you have a swimming pool, are the deck and pool clean (when in season)?
- Do all outside lights work? Replace any burned out bulbs, and clean fixtures of dirt and cobwebs.
- Is there a shed? Does it look presentable?
- Do windows and exterior doors need recaulking? Even at 6-7 years of age, the caulking may be dried out and in need of replacement.
- Do you have decorative wooden poles on the porch? Is the wood at the bottom in good condition? Overall, does it need a new coat of paint?
- If you have a gate, is it well oiled?

When you have completed the curb appeal inspection, carefully check the rest of your home's exterior.

Will Your Roof and Chimney Pass Inspection?

If you are uneasy about climbing onto your roof, you can inspect most items from the ground using binoculars. Otherwise, be careful when working or moving about on your roof. Unless roof repair is a simple matter of applying new caulking, you will probably need the services of a professional.

- Check the general condition of your roof. Sagging sections, curled shingles, pooled water on flat roofs and corrosion on metal roofing mean it is time for repair or replacement.
- Both masonry and metal chimneys need to be straight and structurally sound, have proper capping on top and watertight flashing where they penetrate the roof.
- All roofs undergo stress from snow and rain loads, so a truss or rafter may become damaged, resulting in a noticeable small depression. A professional should do this inexpensive repair.

Examine Your Walls

The condition of your exterior walls directly affects the look and curb appeal of your home.

- Replace old caulking. You may have to cut or scrape away old caulking to get a good seal. Do not seal drainage or ventilation gaps.
- Is your exterior paint looking good? If you see faded colours and cracked or peeling surfaces, you need to repaint. Be sure to get competitive bids if you hire professional painters.
- You can clean vinyl siding but defects or damage to it and to metal siding usually means replacement.
- Stucco can be repaired but some skill is required to blend patches with existing stucco.

Now, Let's Go Indoors

A prospective buyer will usually enter through your front door; so, that is where you should begin your interior inspection. You want your buyer to see a neat, clean, well-lit interior. Get clutter out of sight; ensure that carpets are clean and floors are scrubbed and polished; and that walls and trim show fresh paint (preferably neutral or light colours).

Take a sniff. Are there any unpleasant odours in your home? If so, track them down and eliminate them. Ensure all your lights work and are free of cobwebs. You want your home to look spacious, bright and fresh.

If you have considerable family memorabilia, consider thinning it out. Your objective is to help potential buyers feel as if they could live in your home. That mental leap becomes more difficult for them if your house resembles a shrine your family.

Professional realtors and decorators say the most important areas of your home to upgrade and modernize are the kitchen and bathrooms. Buyers also want to see new or recently installed floor coverings throughout.

General Interior

- Check stairs for loose boards, ripped carpeting, and missing or loose handrails and guards.
- Most problems with interior walls are cosmetic and can be repaired with spackling compound and paint.
- Ensure doors open and shut properly. Minor sticking is normal but excessive binding indicates possible structural problems.
- Open and close all windows to ensure they work properly. Fogging between the panes of a sealed window indicates the seal is broken and the unit needs to be replaced.
- Keep furniture to a minimum so rooms do not appear smaller than they are. Ensure that traffic can flow in or through rooms unimpeded. If they contain bookshelves or cabinets overflowing with books, magazines and knick-knacks, remove some of these items.
- Ensure closets look spacious, organized and uncluttered. Create space by getting rid of old clothes and junk.
- Remove or lock away valuables such as jewellery, coins, currency, cameras and compact discs.

Kitchen and Bathrooms

- People splash water around in the kitchen and bathrooms so check around sinks, tubs and toilets for rotting countertops and floors. Problems could be due to poor caulking or plumbing leaks. Fogged windows, molds and sweating toilet tanks indicate high humidity levels, which you can remedy with exhaust fans.
- In the kitchen, clean all appliances, including your oven. Clean or replace your greasy stove hood filter. Clean your cabinets inside and out, as well as your countertops and backsplashes. Repair dripping faucets.
- Remove anything stored on top of your fridge and remove artwork and magnets.
- Remove any items stored on countertops.
- Remove items stored under the sink.
- In bathrooms, scrub sinks, tubs and toilets, taking care to remove any rust stains. Remove mildew from showers and bathtubs. Fix dripping faucets or trickling toilets, and vacuum your fan grill.
- Clean mirrors, light switch plates and cupboard handles.
- Consider installing new 6-litre toilets if you currently have water-guzzlers.
- If you have ceramic tile in either your kitchen or bathroom, ensure grouting is intact and clean.

Basement

The condition of the foundation and main structural members in the basement are critical to the fitness of any house. The purpose of your inspection is to make sure these are sound and durable.

- Look for cracks, water seepage, efflorescence (white powder-like substance), crumbling mortar or concrete, and rotting wood. If any of these problems are present, you need to do further research to learn about causes and possible solutions.
- If your basement is damp or musty, consider using a dehumidifier.
- Like all other areas of your home, your basement should be organized and clutter-free.
- Change the filters in the furnace and have it cleaned—this is the number one item purchasers want done after a home inspection.
- If you have a pet with a litterbox, ensure the litterbox is clean.

Garage

- Get rid of the broken tools, old car parts, discarded bicycles, empty paint cans and the hundreds of other useless items that accumulate in garages. Again, you want a clutter-free zone.
- Use cleaning solutions to remove oil stains from the floor.

When It's Showtime!

You have inspected your house and taken care of problems. Now you are ready for showings. You will need a plan of action that assigns duties to each family member so the place can quickly be whipped into shape.

- Open all drapes, blinds, etc. and turn on lights to make the house bright.
- Air out the house to get rid of cooking, pet odours, and so on.
- Have fresh flowers in view.
- Pick up clutter, and empty garbage.
- Make sure everything is spotless.
- Set your thermostat at a comfortable level.
- Remove pets from the house or put them outside.
- If you have an agent, leave when the house is being shown. If you are selling it yourself, you need to strike a balance between being helpful and crowding the buyer.
- In poor weather, provide a place for boots, overshoes and umbrellas.
- Display photos of the house in summer to show landscaping if selling in the winter months.
- Leave out heating and hydro bills.