

# Protect Your Investment with Environmental Inspections

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**Y**ou've heard it over and over: Buying a house is probably the biggest investment you'll ever make. Faced with the numerous incidental costs of buying a home, it's often tempting to forego some of the building inspections that could preserve that investment.

Many people hire building and termite inspectors when evaluating a new home for purchase. The information gained from these inspections often increases the buyer's ability to make better purchase decisions and ensure that the property will hold its value. Additional inspections buyers should consider to protect their investment include radon gas, indoor air quality, lead-based paint, and asbestos-containing material. To ensure that a house will maintain its livability and salability, environmental problems must be identified and addressed.

**Existing homes:** If the house was built prior to 1978, a **lead-based paint inspection** ensures that work on the house can be done safely to protect the home, property and inhabitants. Can't you just assume you have lead in an older home? Sure. But you're more likely to take the needed precautions, say, when you just want to sand a little paint off the window sill, if an inspector has pointed to that place and said, "There's lead there and here's how you work on it safely." It's important that your contractors are informed of the presence of lead-based paint and understand how to work safely with it.

If the house was built prior to the 1980's, an **asbestos inspection** safeguards the property against contamination from work that could disturb unsuspected asbestos material. You know that floor tile in the kitchen you just hate and thought you'd pull up? Maybe you'll sand that layer of glue that was holding down the tile. Oops! If you didn't check it for asbestos, you can spread fibers all over, contaminating house, property and its residents. A clean up after an asbestos mistake can cost thousands and lower your property's salability. Again, contractors need to understand how to work safely on asbestos-containing materials.

**New homes and existing homes:** Every house – every house – should have a test for radon gas, the Number One environmental health hazard in the U.S. New or old, walk-out basement or slab, every floor plan or construction style can have radon gas entering from the soil below in amounts high enough to cause lung cancer. The U.S. EPA reminds us that any house might be the only one within miles that has high radon. Your neighbors' radon levels don't determine whether you may be one of the 22,000 people every year dying from lung cancer from radon. You need to test and fix to preserve your homes' value.

Even brand new construction can have water problems that breed mold and other microorganisms that can make people ill. An **indoor air quality inspection** focuses on moisture, gases, and other contaminants that can make a house unpleasant and possibly unhealthy to live in. Moisture allows fungi to grow, which can destroy the building materials and make the house smell bad. Pest infestations caused by excess moisture can reduce the value of your property and certainly make it a health threat to you and your family.

Buying a home is a big investment. When you are ready to take that next step into home ownership, be sure to contact your local REALTOR and let them expertly guide you through the home buying process. Remember also, **not** to skimp on the environmental inspections up front or you may end up paying many times over maintaining your property or when you try to sell it. Including environmental inspections protects your investment--and your family's health.

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