

Survey of Home Inspectors Helps Builders Identify Potential Trouble Spots

A construction quality survey conducted by NAHB and the American Society of Home Inspectors has identified typical problems that new home inspectors are seeing in flashing, roofing, grading and site drainage, and ventilation and also includes their reports of the most commonly encountered building code violations and trade contractor issues.

The survey was devised to provide builders with another tool to help them continue building quality homes for their customers, minimize construction defect lawsuits and make themselves more attractive to insurers by identifying those problem areas within the design and construction process that home inspectors see most frequently.

While there is no consensus that the items identified in the survey constitute construction defects and some of them are local or regional in nature, a pamphlet on the study developed by the NAHB Building Product Issues Committee and available to NAHB members only notes that, home inspectors can bring a reliable set of eyes to the project on construction products and practices that seem to have a high incidence of failure or might lead to a failure in the future.

Among the findings of the survey:

- Flashing problems are most apparent on chimneys (60%), roofs (56%), wood decks (54%), windows (51%) and doors (28%). Cited by 92% of the inspectors surveyed, installation was by far the most common cause of these problems. As examples of improper flashing at doors and windows, 33% said that the flashing was missing altogether, 16% said there was no head flashing and 14% said that the flashing was too short.
- Among design-related roofing problems that are being encountered by inspectors are: valleys that dead-end or terminate at walls (35%), improper roof slope or pitch (9%) and ventilation (7%). Roofing problems related to installation include: inadequate nailing (33%), absent or damaged felt (23%), exposed nails (20%), absence of a drip edge (9%) and poor flashing details (7%). As an example of where the roof installation is not to the manufacturers specifications, 32% cited inadequate nailing too many or too few nails, or nails placed too high or too low.
- Problem areas for grading and site drainage include: grading and drainage (including the siting of the house) not sloping away from the house (42%), downspouts and splash blocks not effectively directing water away from the house (35%) and general compaction of the backfill on site after construction is complete, showing some settlement leading to a negative grade (19%).
- Examples of ventilation problems observed in the attic, roof, kitchen and bathrooms include: exhaust fans vented to the attic (43%), ventilation not properly sized (21%), blocked vents (21%), mold and moisture problems in the structure (18%) and vents not properly installed (7%).

- Building code violations that are commonly observed include: improper or missing baluster spacing and rail heights on stairs, ungrounded electrical outlets and loose wiring, B-vent flues too close to the wood, inadequate flashing and water heater relief valve pipes that don't extend to the drain or are missing.
- Problems with the coordination of work among trade contractors include plumbers, electricians and HVAC contractors cutting framing members (34%) and flashing-related problems (18%).