

Home Buyer's Do-It-Yourself Pre-Offer Checklist

This checklist is not intended to replace a home inspection by a state certified home inspector. It is intended to help home buyers evaluate homes they are considering buying before they make an offer. This checklist should be used to help rule out unsatisfactory homes **before making an offer on them.**

INTERIOR

Doors

- Do all doors open and close easily without binding against the frame or scraping on the floor?
- Do all doors actually latch?
- Do bedroom and bathroom doors have a lock on them? Does the lock work?
- When a door is closed, is the gap between the door and the frame pretty even all the way around the sides and top of the door?
- If it is an exterior door, does it close tightly against the frame so that you cannot see daylight around the edges of the door?
- If it is an exterior door, do the keys operate easily? Is there a deadbolt?

Windows

- Do all windows open and close easily?
- Do all windows stay up when you raise them?
- Do all windows have locks that are easy to use when you close the window?
- Is there any cracked, broken, or missing window glass?
- If the windows have energy efficient "thermopane" glass, is it clear? (should not be fog between glass)
- Do you feel any drafts around any of the windows?

Electrical (bring a small lamp or radio with you)

- Are there cover plates on all switches and outlets?
- Can you tell what each switch turns on and off?
- Can you find a switch for every light and ceiling fan?
- Are all lights securely attached to the ceiling or wall?
- Are the outlets two prong or three prong? (two prong are dated and can be a problem)
- Does your lamp or radio come on when you plug it into each outlet?
- Are there enough outlets in each room and are they in the right places for the way you would live in the house?
- Are there smoke detectors in the house? Do they work? Must be at least one working smoke detector on each floor.

Plumbing

- Is there a stopper at each sink and tub?
- When you turn on the hot water at a sink or tub, how long does it take for the water to get hot? Does it get hot enough?

- Is the inside of the cabinet under the sink dry?
- In each bathroom, turn on the sink and the shower at the same time. Then flush the commode. Does the water pressure stay strong or does it drop?
- When you turn on the shower head does it have a strong spray? Does it leak around the pipe or spray off in strange directions?
- Close the sink and tub stoppers and run some water (fill up the sink). Let it sit for a couple of minutes. Does the sink or tub hold water or does it drain out around the stopper?
- When you open the drains on the sinks and tubs does the water drain out quickly or does it take a long time?
- Look under sinks when you open the stopper. Do you see any drips coming from anywhere?
- When you flush the commode does it flush completely?
- When the commode tank fills up does it cut off completely or can you hear water trickling after you think it is off?
- Check the floor carefully around all tubs, showers, commodes, and sink cabinets. Is there any water on the floor? Are there any signs of water stains? If the floor is linoleum or vinyl, are the edges curling up? Are there any cracks where the floor meets the tub or wall or cabinet where water could seep in?
- Look around to see if you can find the water heater. It is probably in a closet or the laundry room. It may be in the attic or under the house. If you find it, how does it look? Clean and shiny or old and rusty? If there is a vent pipe coming out of the top of it, does it look straight and firmly secured? Do you smell any gassy smells?

Walls and Ceilings

- Do any walls or ceilings have holes in them?
- Are all the walls and ceilings reasonably straight and flat with no bulges in them?
- Do all walls and ceilings seem solid and secure?
- Do any walls have large cracks (especially around doors or windows?)
- Do any ceilings have large cracks (especially where they meet walls?)
- Are there any dark stains on ceilings or walls?
- Do any places on the walls or ceilings feel damp or wet?

Interior Trim

- Are any pieces of trim around doors, windows, or floors missing such that you can see the framing?
- On exterior door jambs around the locks, are there any large cracks in the wood?

Interior Paint (Special rules apply if the house was built before 1978. See the section on lead below)

- Is everything that should be painted actually have paint on it?
- Is the paint in good condition?

Flooring

- Stand in the middle of each room and bounce on your toes. Does the floor feel solid or does it shake and rattle?

- Look around the edges of the room. Do you see any large gaps between the floor and the baseboard?
- When you walk across the floor does it feel level or do you feel spots where you seem to be walking up or down hill?
- Are there any sections of floor covering missing?

Closets

- Gently pull down on the shelves. Do they feel strong and securely attached to the wall?
- What kind of material is the closet rod made out of? Is it strong or is it going to bend or break when you load up the closet with all your clothes?

Cabinets

- Do all the doors open and close properly and are they all firmly attached to the cabinets?
- Do all the drawers open and close easily?
- Do all the cabinets seem to be firmly attached to the walls?
- When you look at the back of the cabinets what do you see? Are there any places where you can see inside walls?
- Are the countertops firmly attached to the cabinets?
- Are the countertops flat without any humps?
- Look carefully around sinks, seams in the countertop, and the edge of the countertop above the dishwasher. Is there any sign of swelling of the countertop or material flaking away?

Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning (HVAC or Mechanical)

- Find the thermostat. Do you understand how it works? If so, turn it up (for heat) or down (for air conditioning) past the room temperature reading on the thermostat.
- Does the heat or air conditioning come on?
- Does it sound smooth or does it make weird noises?
- Walk around and check the vents in each room. Do you feel a strong air flow coming out of each one? Does the air feel warm or cool?
- Look for the air return (a large grille usually on a wall or ceiling). Does it have a filter in it? How dirty is the filter?
- Let the system run while you are checking out the rest of the house. How long does it take for the temperature to raise or lower to the setting you chose?
- Don't forget to return the thermostat to its original setting before you leave!
- Check the bathrooms. If they have bath fans, do the fans work? How noisy are they? If a bathroom does not have a fan, it must have a window that opens.

Attic

- Walk around inside the house and try to find the access to the attic. It may be a set of pull down stairs or it may just be a small square panel in the ceiling of a closet somewhere.
- If it is a pull down stairs, pull down on the cord and unfold the stairs. Did they unfold easily? Is the ladder straight with its feet solidly on the floor?

- Carefully walk up one or two steps and stop. Do the stairs feel solid and safe? If not, come back down.
- If the stairs feel safe, carefully make your way up the ladder until your head is above the attic floor high enough to take a good look around. Camera and flashlight are helpful. **Do not get off the ladder into the attic!**
- Look around and make notes of what you see.
- Is there insulation in the attic? How much? Is it evenly distributed or are there high and low spots?
- Look at the underside of the roof. Do all the rafters look straight, solid, and evenly spaced? Does the roof sheathing look flat and in good condition? Do you see any dark spots that might be water stains? Does anything look wet? If you see a chimney, how does the wood around it look?
- Do you see any ductwork in the attic? Are the ducts insulated? Is there a large metal box that might be your furnace or air handler? Does it look clean and new or old and dingy? Is it running? Does it sound smooth and quiet or does it sound rough and loud?
- If you can see any plumbing pipes, do they look straight, well supported, and in good condition? Do you see any signs they have been leaking?
- **If you see any electrical wiring, do not touch it.** Does it look neat and orderly or is it messy and disorganized? Do you see any loose ends of wires hanging down or laying on the insulation? Does any of the wiring look damaged?
- What else do you see that you have questions about?

EXTERIOR

Roof

- Look along the ridge line. Is it nice and straight or does it sag in the middle?
- What kind of roof covering does the house have? (shingles, metal, etc.)
- Does it look new or worn?
- Are there any missing shingles? Are the shingles lying flat or are the corners curling up? Do the bottom edges look like a lot of the grit has worn off?
- If it is a metal roof, do you see any signs of rust? Is the roof all the same color or are there splotchy areas where repairs have been made?
- If there is a chimney, look at where the roof meets the chimney. Does everything look nice and neat or does it look kind of raggedy or sloppy?
- Does the chimney itself look neat and straight? Does it look like it may be leaning? Are there any signs of loose bricks or loose mortar?
- There will be a couple of pipes and vents on the roof. Does the roofing around them look neat and watertight or does something look strange?

Boxing (roof overhang)

- Stand at the front or back of the house and look along the edge of the roof where it overhangs the wall. Is the edge nice and straight or is it all wavy or saggy?
- On the bottom side of the roof overhang, is it neatly closed in or can you see the roof rafters?
- Does it look like there are any missing boards on the edge of the roof or on the bottom side?

- Is it all neatly painted or can you see bare wood? Do you see any areas where there is black or crumbly or rotted wood?

Gutters and Drainage

- Does the house have gutters?
- Do they look like they are all straight and firmly attached to the edge of the roof? Or, are they all wavy and saggy and look like they could fall off any minute?
- Are all the downspouts in place and firmly attached to the house and gutters?
- Are there splash blocks or drain extensions at the bottom of each downspout?
- Is there any standing water in the area of the downspouts, especially around the foundation?
- Look at the direction the ground slopes around the house, especially at the downspouts. Does the ground slope away from the house or towards the house?
- Look around the yard. Is there any standing water anywhere? Are there low spots where the grass is a lighter color or a lot of leaves or dirt have settled?

Exterior Siding

- What material is the siding made of?
- If it is brick, do you see any cracks in the brick or mortar, especially around doors or windows? Are there any loose bricks? Is there a lot of missing or crumbly mortar?
- If it is wood siding, what kind of condition is the wood in? Are there any missing boards? Do any of the boards seem loose or are there any nails sticking out or missing? Are there any dark or stained areas? Are the joints where the boards meet each other nice and tight or are there gaps? Are there any places where the wood seems to be crumbly or soft?
- If it is vinyl siding, does it look clean? Are there any missing pieces? Look carefully at the bottom of the wall and the very top? Do any of the pieces seem to be loose? Look at the joints where pieces meet. Do they seem neat and secure? Are there any gaps?

Doors and Windows

- Look carefully around the edges where the trim meets the siding. Are all the joints nice and tight together? Or are there gaps or cracks?
- Look carefully at the trim around the doors and windows, especially at the bottoms. Is the wood nice and solid or is it crumbly or spongy or discolored?
- If there are storm windows or screens on the windows are they all there or are some of them missing or broken?
- Look around the edges of the doors where they meet the frame. Do they meet neatly and evenly or are there gaps? If there is weather stripping is the door in full contact with the weather stripping all the way around the door or are there gaps?
- If there are storm doors or screen doors, are they working right? Do they close and latch properly?

Exterior Paint

- Look closely at the painted materials on the house. Do they look neat and fresh?
- Is there any bare wood that should be painted?

- Is there any cracked, bubbling, peeling or flaking paint?
- When was the house built? If the house was built before 1978, special rules apply. See the section on lead hazards below.

Yard, Drives, and Sidewalks

- Are there any large dead trees in the yard?
- Are there any large limbs hanging over the roof?
- Are tree branches rubbing up against the siding or the roof?
- Are the bushes neatly trimmed or do they look overgrown?
- If there are bushes around the house can you walk between the bushes and the house or are the bushes rubbing right up against the house?
- Look at the sidewalks and driveway. Are they in good condition? Are they flat and smooth? Or are there broken sections or tilted sections?

Outbuildings and Fences

- Are they in good condition? Look at each outbuilding inside and out asking the same questions about each component as you did with the main house.
- Look at the fences and gates. Do the gates open and close easily? Does the fence look straight and strong or is it sagging and leaning?
- Is there anything that looks like it would be a safety hazard?

Foundation and Crawlspace (if the house is built on a slab, there won't be a crawl space)

- Walk around the house looking at the foundation. It is probably made of brick or block. Does it look straight and level and neat? Do you see any cracks or missing bricks or mortar?
- Look for the foundation vents. Are they in good condition? Are any loose or missing?
- Look for the crawl door. Open this door if you can and look inside (bring a flashlight or camera). **Do not go inside!** Describe what you see. Does it look neat and orderly inside or is it all trashy looking?
- Do you see any water on the ground inside? Is there a layer of plastic on the ground?
- Is there any insulation in the floor? Is it neat or is it falling down?
- Are the floor joists straight and evenly spaced? Do you see any rotten or discolored wood anywhere?
- If you can see any block piers, do they look straight and solid and in good condition?
- Can you see any ductwork? Does it have insulation on it? Does it look like it is in good condition?
- Do you see a large metal box connected to the ductwork? This is probably your furnace or air handler. How does it look? Fresh and new or old and battered?
- If you can see any plumbing pipes, do they look straight, well supported, and in good condition? Do you see any signs they have been leaking?
- **If you see any electrical wiring, do not touch it.** Does it look neat and orderly or is it messy and disorganized? Do you see any loose ends of wires hanging down or laying on the ground? Does any of the wiring look damaged?
- What else do you see that you have questions about?

Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning

- Walk around the house looking for the outdoor heating and air unit. This could be a heat pump, an air conditioner, or a gas pack. How does it look? Kind of shiny and new? Or old and dented? Is it running? How does it sound? Smooth and constant or rough and uneven? Is there plenty of space around it or is it hidden in the middle of a bunch of bushes?
- Walk around and look for small square plastic boxes with flappers on walls. These are the exhaust vents for your dryer and bath fans. Are the flappers still attached? Do they open and close easily? Are there screens to keep bugs out? Is there a lot of lint around the dryer vent?

Plumbing and Electrical

- Walk around the house and look for the outdoor spigots. How many are there? Turn them on to make sure they work. How does the water look? When you turn them off do they drip?
- Walk around the house and look for outdoor electrical outlets. Plug in your lamp or radio. Do they work? Do they have weatherproof covers over them?

Porches

- Are there more than 3 steps up to the porch? If so, there must be a handrail on the stairs.
- If there is a handrail, what condition is it in? Is it firmly attached to the ground and the house? Grab it and tug on it. Is it solid or does it wobble?
- Are the individual steps flat and solid? Do you feel safe walking up and down the steps?
- How high off the ground is the porch floor? If it is more than 30", there must be a railing around it.
- If there is a railing, what condition is it in? Is it firmly attached to the porch columns? When you push on it does it feel solid or does it have a lot of give in it?

LEAD-BASED PAINT AND LEAD HAZARDS

If the house you are looking at was built in 1978 or later you can disregard this section. However, if the house was built before 1978, you must pay careful attention to this section. Lead-based paint was commonly used in houses for decades until it was finally banned by the government. It was banned because we finally figured out lead is poisonous to human beings. It is particularly damaging to young children. Please refer to the lead pamphlets you were given by the inspector or your agent for further information.

The following is a summary of the rules that apply to houses built before 1978 that are bought with assistance through the HOP program:

- You must receive the booklets mentioned above which describe lead hazards and how to deal with them safely.
- The inspector must perform a visual inspection of the property to identify any and all deteriorated paint. Paint that is cracking, bubbling, flaking, peeling, or covering damaged materials is considered to be deteriorated.

- All paint must be presumed to contain lead unless the house has been inspected by a state certified lead inspector who tests individual components of the house and issues a report identifying which components contain lead and which do not (report typically costs \$600-800).
- All lead-based paint (known or presumed) must be stabilized. That means all deteriorated paint must be removed using lead safe work practices and the surface repainted. This work must be performed by a state certified Renovation, Repair, and Painting (RRP) contractor.
- Clearance testing must be done by a state certified lead inspector to determine that lead hazards have been controlled.
- A report must be provided to you summarizing the results of the clearance testing.

If you are looking at a house built before 1978 look carefully at the following items as you perform your inspection of the house:

- Walk through each room of the house, looking carefully at each wall and ceiling and the doors and trim.
- Make notes of all locations that have chipped, cracked, bubbling, flaking, peeling, or otherwise damaged paint.
- Look at each door carefully. When you close the door, does any part of the door rub or bind against the door frame?
- Look carefully at each window. Are there paint chips in the window trough (between the window and storm window)? Is there dust on the window sill? Is the house very dusty? Lead in dust can be a greater hazard than lead in paint. An obviously dusty home built before 1978 with deteriorated paint will trigger an in-depth risk assessment of the house.
- Walk around the outside of the house. Make careful notes of all chipped, cracked, bubbling, flaking, peeling, or otherwise damaged paint.
- Look at the soil as you walk around the house. Are paint chips visible in the soil? All paint chips in soil around houses built before 1978 are presumed to contain lead. All chips must be removed from the soil. Large amounts of chips in the soil indicate the need to have the soil tested for lead contamination.

SUMMARY

Use this checklist to generate your own list of concerns about a particular house you are considering. Remember, no house is perfect. Every house will have some problems. If, after going through this list, you find you have very few items on your list and most of them seem minor, you probably have found a pretty good house.

However, if you come up with a long list of items and some of them seem pretty major or expensive, you may want to reconsider making an offer on the house. Remember, the HOP inspector will probably find even more problems than you have and a state certified home inspector will likely find still more.

Each real estate transaction is different and everything is negotiable. Your real estate agent will be able to help you decide how likely you are to be able to negotiate successfully with a particular seller on a particular house.