



# Home Inspection Defects Explained

Some home inspectors make minor defects sound more serious than they are. Unfortunately this can make buyers shy away from a home that is in good condition, or cause undue frustration with sellers. We prefer our clients understand the real life implications of anything we have found. Below is a list of some common defects inspectors find, what it really means and how they can be easily repaired.

## ELECTRICAL

**“Reverse polarity”**- is a very minor condition whereby the hot and neutral wires are switched. Most appliances work fine either way, few require correct polarity. It also switches power to the threads of a light socket, which can shock children’s fingers. Fix: With power off, reverse the wires to the receptacle.

**“Double tapped”** breakers. Means two wires are feeding to the same breaker, which can (not often) overheat the connection at the breaker. Exception- Square D brand QO type panel boxes allow for double taps. Many inspectors don’t know this. Fix: With power off, add a breaker and route the second wire to the new properly sized breaker (if there is space in the panel box).

**“GFCI receptacles not tripping off”**- This usually means that the receptacle still has power, but that the shock safety device isn’t working properly by turning off power to the receptacle when there is an imbalance of power between the hot and neutral. Fix: Replace the receptacle for under \$15 in parts.

**“Oversized breaker”** - Then the breaker is too large for the wire feeding to it. Very common with Air conditioner breakers, and usually a very simple repair of replacing the breaker with a smaller one. If the lower breaker keeps tripping off, further electrical evaluation is needed. Fix: Typically under \$20

## PLUMBING

**“Copper and galvanized pipe contact”**- Copper and steel metals don’t like each other, they cause corrosion inside the pipes whenever they are connected to each other, thus causing a water flow restriction over time. Fix: Dialectic unions between the two metals, about \$5 per union.

**“Sump pump routed into sewage system”**- Sump pumps collect yard water from around the house. Sending it into the city sewage system can overload the city’s sewage treatment plant. It can also allow combustible sewer gasses to enter the house from the sewage pipes. Ejector pumps also can allow sewer gasses into the home if not properly sealed. Fix: Plumber for about an hour, plus some parts cost.

**“TPR overflow pipe missing or too short”**- All water heaters have temperature & pressure relief (TPR) valves that protect the tank from explosion. A pipe is connected to the valve to prevent hot water (shooting out the valve when tripped) from burning someone in the area. Easy Fix: Extend a properly sized metal pipe from the TPR valve to 3” off the floor.

## ROOFING/FLASHINGS/CHIMNEYS

**“Exposed nail heads”**- Steel nail heads can rust off, causing the shingles to lift and become damaged with wind. Easy Fix: Cover heads with roofing caulk, also called mastic.

**“Curled, aged or weathered shingles”**- The most important parts of the asphalt shingles are the condition of the asphalt membrane and granules (the little rocks) that repel the water. Roofs can last many years beyond common curling and aging. The key is the percent loss of granules and original installation. Roof valleys, penetration areas and south or west slopes usually deteriorate faster due to sun and water concentrations. Our experience is that light colored shingles last about 10% longer.

**“Multiple layers”**- Due to weight, most areas only allow two layers of shingles. A roof with two layers will not last as long as one layer due to the higher heat generated with two layers. Shingle manufacturers also don’t warrantee their product when applied over another layer. Fix: Wait until the top layer fails, then “tear off” all layers and install a new roof covering.

**“Rain cap or spark screen missing”**- Rain can run into the chimney and deteriorate the base of the chimney over time. A spark screen prevents fireplace discharges from igniting roofing materials or neighboring houses. It also helps prevent animal entry into the chimney, like bats and squirrels. Easy Fix: For \$50 in parts, a rain cap with spark screen can be installed.

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## EXTERIOR

**“Improperly sloped grading”**- When water ponds around the foundation of a home, it can damage the foundation over time and promote water seepage into the basement or crawlspace. It is common for the grading to settle in the first ten years of a home, 3-4 feet around the home, and perimeter drainage can also clog. Fix: Sometimes this problem can be remedied with re-grading the slopes away from the house, re-routing downspouts or installing new subsurface drainage systems.

**“Weep holes missing”**- Weep holes are small holes (sometimes filled with ropes) at the bottom row of brick veneer. Brick is a porous material that rain can penetrate through it. A cavity behind the brick veneer collects that water, which needs a way to escape, or rotting behind the brick could occur. Fix: Have a brick mason drill weep holes and inspect for water damage with a boroscope.

## HEATING

**“Drip leg missing”**- A drip leg is a 3-6” capped gas pipe pointing downward, usually found near water heaters and furnaces. It collects condensation and debris that might be in the gas supply pipe so that it does not enter the gas control valve, causing it to rust or clog. Water heaters have exploded due to debris clogging in the gas valve. Fix: A plumber or HVAC professional for about 30 minutes plus about \$10 in parts.

**“Furnace cabinet shut off switch”**- This is a small safety device (furnaces newer than 1980) that shuts off the furnace when the blower motor cabinet cover is removed. Sometimes people tape them up so they don’t operate. Fix: Parts are about \$50 plus a service call from an HVAC professional.

**“Cracked heat exchanger”**- These words historically have signaled immediate death to the furnace, and sometimes home purchases due to some misconceptions of carbon monoxide poisoning. However, whenever a crack develops in the heat exchanger, the air pressure is greater on the house air side than the combustion air side of the heat exchanger, meaning air would blow into the fire area not from the fire area. Meaning that the likelihood of carbon monoxide gasses or combustion fumes entering the house are quite minimal. However, if the crack becomes large (a small crack can grow), gasses can enter the house air residually (after a burn cycle). Therefore, whenever we see a cracked heat exchanger (which is not often), we recommend the furnace be further evaluated. But it doesn’t always mean the situation is immediately dangerous. Fix: Furnaces older than ten years, usually means a new furnace, otherwise the heat exchanger can be replaced.

## INSULATION

**“Blocked crawlspace vents”**- The prevailing theory was to vent crawlspaces, and many inspectors still note this as a defect if not well ventilated. However, vented crawlspaces allow cold air to condensate on warm floor joists in the winter, causing rotting and energy inefficiency. In the summer, vented crawlspaces allow hot humid air into the crawlspace, again promoting mold and rot to occur. Fix: Installing a professional grade vapor barrier on the crawl floor, sealing the vents and insulating the crawlspace walls. Proper drainage around the home also needs to be in place.

**“Too much attic insulation”**- Bit of a red herring. If the attic insulation is packed up against the sheathing (the wood that the shingles are nailed too) preventing proper ventilation in the attic, mold or rot can develop on the roof sheathing. If this is the case, the amount of insulation is not the problem, it’s how it was installed. Fix: (Provided no mold exists) Install baffles (or chutes) to assist the soffit venting by holding back the insulation.

## INTERIOR

**“Thermoseal Compromise”**- This is when the vacuum seal breaks between two layers of glass on thermo pane windows. This happens due to a manufacturing defect, improper installation, or significant barometric pressure fluctuation. Seal compromise causes the window to cloud up over time, and lowers the insulation (R-Value) of the glass. Fix: Replacing the sealed glass insert or window.

**“Loose toilet, or caulked toilet to the floor”** - A loose toilet can cause the wax seal to fail under the toilet, causing floor and ceiling damage below. A caulked toilet base can disguise a wax seal leak until the problem is more severe with rotten floor boards. Fix: Cut away the caulk around a toilet base and replace the wax seal for under \$10

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