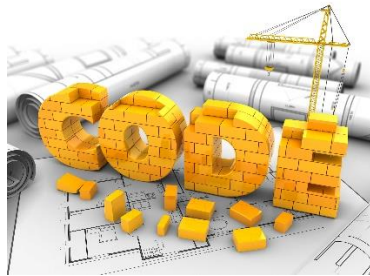




Professional Property Inspections

NEWSLETTER



DO HOME INSPECTORS CHECK CODE?

Do Home Inspectors check code? The short answer is no, they do not. But there is more to the question than just yes or no. Let's dive into it.

In New York, licensed Home Inspectors follow what is known as the Standards of Practice. This is a set of guidelines that state what home inspectors shall and shall not inspect. It also states that home inspectors are required to report on unsafe conditions. An unsafe condition is defined as a condition that presents a significant risk of bodily injury during normal, day-to-day use; either due to damage, deterioration, improper installation or a change in construction standards.

So, what are these standards? Although they are not specifically codes, most, if not all inspectors know that this means code because construction standards are defined by codes. So technically Home Inspectors do not inspect for code compliance but in many instances, they are actually checking code. In addition to many code compliance items that are checked during a home inspection there are many more things that have nothing to do with code but are equally as important such as: How old is my roof? How long will my HVAC equipment last? How old are my windows and should I replace them? Will my basement have water intrusion?

With me so far? Now here is where it gets a little confusing. A home inspector cannot be expected to know every code for each of the building trades. This would be nearly impossible. But they must be familiar enough with the current version of the IRC (International Residential Code) to know when things don't seem right. They can also use safety as a compass to help them determine what recommendations they should make and when.



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You might ask why your inspector would not check all codes? An inspector must be a generalist, not a specialist. A generalist must have a deep knowledge of each of the building trades so that they can pick out small details that might present an issue to the performance and functionality of a system or present a safety concern. There are far too many codes within the IRC to memorize them all. Also, Home Inspectors inspect homes that were built at different times and with different sets of codes. Not all new codes must be complied with. Older houses are “grandfathered” from many newer codes because keeping up with current codes would mean rebuilding houses much more often than homeowners would like. They only must comply with new codes as the house gets upgrades or remodeled.

Here are a few examples of where building codes and Home Inspector Standards of Practice overlap:

1. Guard rails too low. An inspector does not need to know the exact height the railing should be but will recommend higher if they seem too low by a visual inspection.
2. Smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors: A home inspector worth their weight in salt should know what current code requires for fire safety.
3. Electrical wiring: A home inspector must know what size wires belong with every size breaker.
4. Soft copper piping used for gas lines inside of a structure: This used to be allowed by code but is no longer and should be replaced with hard (steel) piping.

The moral of the story is, your Home Inspectors is not required to check code by the New York State Standards of Practice, but they had better be familiar enough with them if they want to be valuable to their clients.