

TOP 5 MUST-HAVE RENOS

Whether buying or selling a property, some minor renovations can increase its value. *Suzanne Sharma* talks to experts who reveal five must-fix defects, how they can be repaired and how much it could cost to do-it-yourself versus hiring a contractor

Cost-effective renovations might be an urban legend, since it's hard to determine what defects will actually provide a return. However, the trick is to think outside the box and know that repairing items for longevity and durability will increase property value. Here, we've dug deep to identify five key problems that some might feel are deal breakers when buying or selling a property, but ironically, may also be the cheapest and easiest to fix. It just goes to show that you shouldn't reject a property until you explore all avenues.

Often times, patching up some of the damages revealed in a pre-listing inspection can allow you to list the property for a higher price and sell faster. If you're in the market to buy, or if you're already a property owner, a home inspection might uncover a few must-have fixes that can minimize

property management issues, garner a premium in rents and also grant you tenants that stay for the long term.

The following is a list of the top five danger signs that were revealed in an inspection of a house, according to Trevor Welby-Solomon, VP of Technical Training, Support and Development, at Pillar To Post, Mississauga, Ont.

1 **Surface water management**

Keeping water away from the home is the best action you can take to reduce the possibility of water intrusion into the home.

"As a contractor I get a lot of calls for basement leaks and foundation damage," says Marshall McCarroll, president of Dale Construction Ltd, Toronto. "Many leaks are repaired quickly and cheaply by re-sloping the grade around the house to lead the

water away. However, even though the symptom (ex. leaky basement) may go away, the underlying foundation defect may still be there."

There is not always the need for machinery to change the grading to slope away from the home. A simple task you could perform is to fill the soil where it has eroded and create a slope away from the home. Remember not to get the soil level closer than 6" to 8" below the exterior wall finish.

DIY: approximately \$80
Contracted service: approximately \$500



If you have flower boxes against the foundation walls of the home, remove them as they are a source of water collection and vegetation often scrubs against the wall finish and creates premature wear by abrasion.



DIY: time and effort
Contracted service:
 approximately \$400



Clean out window wells to enable them to act properly and drain water away as quickly as possible.

DIY: time and effort
Contracted service:
 approximately \$200



Keep the swales between your house and your neighbours' clear of any debris and make sure that nobody has filled it or modified it in any way that impedes the flow of surface water to the storm drainage sewer.

DIY: time and effort
Contracted service:
 approximately \$200



Add leaders and splash blocks to your downspouts to ensure that the discharge is at least six feet away from your home on a grade that slopes away from the building.

DIY: approximately \$100
Contracted service:
 approximately \$300

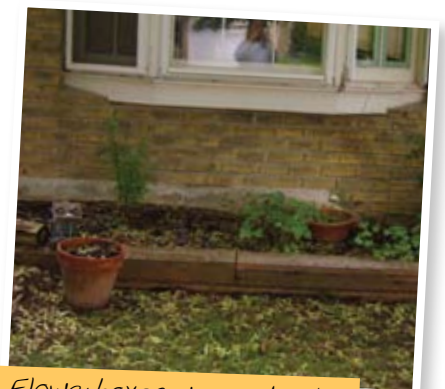


2 Keep your gutters clean of vegetation and debris

Overflowing gutters not only cause leaks through adjacent windows or other construction gaps that may not be visible to the eye, they also allow water to spill over the barge boards causing them to develop rot. In severe cases it can also create rot in the sheathing. When they are clogged, the rain or melting snow overflows and drops down right beside the house and this is a major cause of basement leaks.



Cost to fix: \$150 with contracted service



Flowerboxes in contact with brickwork not a good idea

Potential returns

The purpose of a pre-listing inspection is to identify the issues that affect the performance of the home, thereby allowing the homeowner to decide what to undertake before placing the home on the market. At issue are a number of things:

- If the buyer's inspector identifies the issue, the purchaser will typically make a safe estimate of the potential cost to remedy and attempt to negotiate a price allowance of two to three times the actual cost.
- If you are aware of issues before you list the home, you have time to make a conscious decision to either do it yourself or to seek professional help. Because you have given yourself breathing room, you have time to call for quotations and work out a reasonable contract with your contractor of choice as opposed to being rushed into accepting the only contractor who can complete the work before closing.
- All expected returns over expected cost published is based on contractors performing the work, so if you are able to perform the work or the bulk of the work yourself thereby removing the labour component, it is possible that the actual return could exceed 100 per cent and furthermore if you factor in the "safe" estimate your potential buyer may put on the issue, your net return on the work will seem more like 300 per cent.

Keep in mind that according to the Appraisal Institute of Canada, "the only upgrades or renovations that stand any chance of achieving a return of 100 per cent on the cost of the job are kitchen renovation, bathroom renovation, exterior painting and interior painting." That said, the maximum return will only be achieved if the work is impeccably and tastefully done. One could never achieve such a high rate of return by merely slapping on a coat of paint or simply retiling a bathroom.

Source: Trevor Welby-Solomon, VP of Technical Training, Support and Development, Pillar To Post, Mississauga, Ont.

"A low-cost roll screen works well to keep out leaves but seeds can still get through. The metal screens also work well but can be difficult to remove if you have to clean out the gutter. The rigid plastic screens need to be attached (usually screwed in place to the gutter brackets) to prevent them from being removed by wildlife. This installation is usually \$6 to \$8 per foot but depends on conditions," says McCarroll.

DIY: time and effort
Contracted service: approximately \$150
**Note: If rot sets, then the scope of work could creep into the \$1,000-plus range for contracted services.*



3 Illegal venting

Bathroom, kitchen and dryer vents must all ventilate to the outside as they carry large amounts of moisture in the form of water vapour, which turns into water when it reaches dew point, says Welby-Solomon.

"Discharging these vents into the attic space is a recipe for disaster because it equates to dumping litres of water into the space above your ceiling. If you are not sure where your vents are terminating, take a peek into the attic in winter and a sure sign of illegal venting aside from the obvious stains on the sheathing, will be hundreds of little icicles hanging from the roofing nails in the vicinity of the vent."

The vents should terminate outside through an approved type vent. Homeowners could probably attempt wall and soffit vents but should leave the installation of roof-mounted vents to a professional. Dryers venting into the basement or anywhere inside a home are the largest cause of rapid mould growth. Where do you think all the water that you have just evacuated from your laundry has gone? If you do not discharge it outside, it has to find a place inside and as soon as the relative humidity rises above 65 per cent, mould grows vociferously and remember, when it turns into water the relative humidity is 100 per cent.

Mould growth is a common cause of illegal venting



Wood rot



Photos: Pillar to Post

DIY: approximately \$150
for two vents, ducting,
insulation, caulk
and hardware



Contracted service:
approximately \$600

4 Soffit vents

Soffit vents work in conjunction with roof or ridge vents, says McCarroll. Generally homeowners want two-thirds of the roof ventilation at the soffit. Cooler air enters the soffit and as it is heated from the sun or from heat escaping the house, it rises through the attic or cathedral ceiling and exits through the roof vents. If snow blocks the roof vent, the soffit ventilation still helps.

Ensure that soffit vents are kept clear of insulation. If you do not have baffles installed, it is an easy job to do. You can make them yourself from plywood, chipboard or cardboard, or you can simply purchase premade baffles from your hardware store. The purpose of ventilating the attic space is threefold:

- to keep the temperature within 10 degrees of the outside air in order that the top of the asphalt shingles is close to the temperature of the bottom of the shingle to reduce the possibility of curling or clawing due to too large a temperature differential between the two sides,
- to keep the relative humidity on both sides of wood roof covering relatively the same to reduce the possibility of curling or clawing, and
- to keep the air circulating to remove any excess moisture that may build



up in the attic space and condense onto the sheathing causing rot or condense and falling into the insulation causing it to lose its insulating value and possibly create ceiling leaks.

DIY: 10 baffles cost
approximately \$100
Contracted service:
approximately \$400



5 Caulking

Gaps between window and door frames and protrusions such as vents are important to reduce the possibility of water intrusion into the building envelope and also to prevent leakage of conditioned air from the home or unconditioned air into the home.

“Most people realize a draft at a window may mean that it needs to be re-caulked,” says McCarroll. “Leaks around skylights and especially around chimneys may also be because of old caulking.”

As important as this is, it is not a job that is out of the reach of a reasonable handyman around the home, adds Welby-Solomon. Ensure that you clean out as much of the loose caulk as possible, clean up the area of any dust or loose debris and apply the caulk as evenly as possible. Start at windows and protrusions in areas where people are least likely to pass by so you can practice for the areas of high visibility.

DIY: approximately \$75
Contracted service:
approximately \$300



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