

Buying a home IN WINTER?



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In the interest of promoting clarity for buyers and sellers, and to encourage thorough work by home inspectors, I have created a series of Olympic events for home inspectors who wish to inspect homes during the winter. By competing in these events daily, all home inspectors can improve their physical fitness level and at the same time provide exemplary service for clients.

The Events

AVALANCHE RESCUE A.K.A. SNOW REMOVAL AT THE FOUNDATION WALLS

Equipment Note: Snow gaiters, shovel and snow pants required. The foundation wall should be inspected, regardless of the season. So, even in the dead of winter, home inspectors need to suck it up and remove snow from at least four or five locations around the home to provide reasonable snapshots representing the condition of the foundation walls and identifying points of possible water infiltration. A similar approach is required at window wells where buyers need to know if the wood has rotted around the basement windows. **What to reasonably expect from the inspector:** Dig “snapshots” showing the condition at buried elements. A reasonable attempt should be demanded.

ICE CLIMBING A.K.A. INSPECTING THE ROOF IN WINTER EVENT

Some inspectors simply check off “could not inspect” on their report if there is snow on a roof. A thorough inspector will drag his or her ladder through the snow and place it at various locations. An attempt should be made to clear snow and examine the condition of

shingles, even though ice will often prevent a clear assessment of the age and condition of the shingles. From the top of the ladder, however, other elements such as higher wall surfaces, flashings and chimneys can be usefully examined. **What to reasonably expect from the inspector:** Get on the darn ladder and examine everything up there, including stuff other than shingles.

WINTER CAVING A.K.A. CRAWLSPACE INSPECTIONS

As a country home inspector, I have seen far too many nasty and horrible crawlspaces. I actually prefer them in winter, because the spiders and other insects are either dead or dormant. On many occasions I have arrived at an inspection to find the crawlspace snowed over. I remember more than one buyer saying, “Well, so much for getting in *there*.” I simply grab a shovel and start digging. I can’t imagine charging a buyer hundreds of dollars not to inspect the structure. I recommend caving as a great way to train for home inspections.

What to reasonably expect from the inspector: “Get the shovel. We’re going in!”

EXPEDITION TO THE HIGH WINDOWS

If windows include wood on the outside, they should all be fully prodded at the sills and bottom corners, where moisture decay is most common. If an inspector prods the wood at one window and finds it is sound and firm, no reasonable conclusions should be drawn from the single test. **What to reasonably expect from the inspector:** Happily dragging the ladder around to every last window. **OH**

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