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10 Questions to Ask Home Inspectors

Before you make your final buying or selling decision, you should have the home inspected by a professional. An inspection can alert you to potential problems with a property and allow you to make an informed decision. Ask these questions to prospective home inspectors:

1. Will your inspection meet recognized standards? Ask whether the inspection and the inspection report will meet all state requirements and comply with a well-recognized standard of practice and code of ethics, such as the one adopted by the American Society of Home Inspectors or the National Association of Home Inspectors. Customers can view each group's standards of practice and code of ethics online at www.ashi.org or www.nahi.org. ASHI's Web site also provides a database of state regulations.
2. Do you belong to a professional home inspector association? There are many state and national associations for home inspectors, including the two groups mentioned in No. 1. Unfortunately, some groups confer questionable credentials or certifications in return for nothing more than a fee. Insist on members of reputable, nonprofit trade organizations; request to see a membership ID.
3. How experienced are you? Ask how long inspectors have been in the profession and how many inspections they've completed. They should provide customer referrals on request. New inspectors also may be highly qualified, but they should describe their training and let you know whether they plan to work with a more experienced partner.
4. How do you keep your expertise up to date? Inspectors' commitment to continuing education is a good measure of their professionalism and service. Advanced knowledge is especially important in cases in which a home is older or includes unique elements requiring additional or updated training.
5. Do you focus on residential inspection? Make sure the inspector has training and experience in the unique discipline of home inspection, which is very different from inspecting commercial buildings or a construction site. If your customers are buying a unique property, such as a historic home, they may want to ask whether the inspector has experience with that type of property in particular.
6. Will you offer to do repairs or improvements? Some state laws and trade associations allow the inspector to provide repair work on problems uncovered during the inspection.

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However, other states and associations forbid it as a conflict of interest. Contact your local ASHI chapter to learn about the rules in your state.

7. How long will the inspection take? On average, an inspector working alone inspects a typical single-family house in two to three hours; anything significantly less may not be thorough. If your customers are purchasing an especially large property, they may want to ask whether additional inspectors will be brought in.

8. What's the cost? Costs can vary dramatically, depending on your region, the size and age of the house, and the scope of services. The national average for single-family homes is about \$320, but customers with large homes can expect to pay more. Customers should be wary of deals that seem too good to be true.

9. What type of inspection report do you provide? Ask to see samples to determine whether you will understand the inspector's reporting style. Also, most inspectors provide their full report within 24 hours of the inspection.

10. Will I be able to attend the inspection? The answer should be yes. A home inspection is a valuable educational opportunity for the buyer. An inspector's refusal to let the buyer attend should raise a red flag.

Source: Rob Paterkiewicz, executive director, American Society of Home Inspectors, Des Plaines, Ill., www.ashi.org.