



# The Professional Inspector

Information Publication for Homeowners, Realtors, Mortgage Brokers, Insurance Brokers, Professional Builders & Inspectors

## Home Maintenance Through Water Control

One of the most documented issues during a home inspection is water drainage control at the exterior of the home and in the basement or crawl space. I observe nearly always some type of damage or deterioration of building materials be it at the foundation, decks and stairs, siding, trim, fascia board or the windows and doors due to the lack of attention of controlling the flow of water from the roof and around the foundation. Here are a few tips towards water damage prevention that could prevent the loss or damage to your property.

### **Tip 1: Eavestrough / Gutters**

Check your eavestrough system for any leaks by pouring a bucket of water into the gutters highest point on the roof line. If you see any leaks at the joints, then those are areas that need to be sealed and not just any type of exterior sealant. One can purchase a type of sealant from your local hardware or building centre that has sealant in a tube specific for sealing joints within the gutters.

### **Tip2: Downspouts**

If connected to your weeping tile or sewer drainage system, it can increase the risk of a flooded basement. The best is to connect your downspouts to a separate drainage system around the outside perimeter of your home and then connects to the storm drain located at

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the street. If not able to, a secondary best would be to extend the drainspouts at grade for five feet down slope of the finished grade. This will assure that water will drain away from the foundation of the home.

**Tip3: Sump Pump**

Periodically test your sump pump and clean the water intake screen. Unless being serviced, always keep the sump pump plugged in and the dedicated circuit breaker on. The discharge line should be directly connected to a storm drain with a one way check valve so that water cannot back up the pipe and into the sump. If not possible, the drain pipe should exit to the exterior and drain into an underground rock pit at least 20 feet down slope away from the exterior foundation of the home.

**Tip 4: Alarms**

Sump pumps can malfunction in a variety of ways. Consider installing a warning device to signal water build-up.

**Tip 5: Backwater Valve**

Install a one-way back water valve in your sewer line to help prevent sewer water from backing up from the municipal sewer into your basement or crawl space.

In effect, we are in a new era of in the real estate profession. We advance because we have knowledge and experience and a network of people with whom we have worked and who believe in us. As I have said in many prior posts, the "T" word, TRUST, is still pretty important, too.

**Common Myths About Real Estate Agents**



Ask anyone about their experiences with real estate agents, and you will no doubt hear a wide variety of responses. There are so many myths about agents that tend to be taken as truths when someone has a negative experience. A good real estate agent is worth every single penny you spend for their expertise. Let's examine some popular myths about real estate agents.

**"They make too much money".**

According to CareersInFinance.com, the median salary for real estate agents in 2009 was approximately \$54,000. Agents have to pay exorbitant business expenses such as broker's fees, professional organization memberships and MLS listing fees. One of our biggest expenses is marketing homes for sale for buyers and sellers. These expenses quickly add up and ultimately take away a large percentage of our pay.



**"They won't get you a good deal because they make a commission on the sale price."**

Yes, real estate commissions are based on a percentage of the sale price. However, consider the same sample percentage, for example, the commission on a \$185,000 home would be \$5550, while the commission on a \$200,000 home, \$6000. That difference of \$450 is hardly worth creating a negative impression by "getting you a bad deal."

**"They will say anything in order to make a sale."**

Professional Real Estate agents work for you; our goal is for you to have a positive experience with us. After all, much of our business comes from referrals. We want you to be happy so you will tell your friends and family about the excellent service that you received when buying or selling with us.

**"They don't do anything you can't do on your own."**

The truth is that buying and selling real estate can be quite complicated and time consuming. Sure, you can order home inspections and surveys on your own. You can even negotiate for your terms. However, professional real estate agents are trained to do this and have experience at it. As a result, we'll save you money, time and make your life less complicated throughout process. Don't underestimate the value of a professional real estate agent.

Written by a Professional Realtor

**How To Spot Grow-Ops And Drug Labs**

Drug pushers aren't picky about the types of neighbourhoods they set up shop in and create the stuff they eventually sell.

So how can you tell if a marijuana grow-op or drug lab is operating in your neighbourhood? Here are some tell-tale signs to look for, *courtesy of York Regional Police*:

- Evidence of tampering with the electrical meter (damaged or broken seals) or the ground around it.
- Homes made to look lived-in by things like light-timers, but very few people are coming in and out of the home.
- Late night or very short visits by people.
- Strange smells or overpowering smells of fabric softener.
- Water lines and/or electrical cords running to the basement or outbuilding.
- Unusual noises such as hammering or drilling into the basement foundation.
- People bringing unusual items into the house, such as bags of soil, lots of plant roots and potting plants.
- Excess potting soil or other grow mediums around the residence or in the immediate area.
- People continually bringing items and taking items away in garbage bags.
- Windows that are always covered.
- Residence or outbuilding has unusual amount of roof vents or exhaust fan noises.
- Outbuildings have air-conditioners.

- Unusual amounts of steam coming from vents in the house in cold weather.
- A house rooftop with no snow on it when the roofs of surrounding houses are snow-covered.
- High condensation around windows. Little or no garbage being put out.
- Individuals arriving at the house to put out the garbage shovel the snow or cut the lawn and then leaving immediately.
- People entering and exiting the residence only through the garage keeping the garage door closed.
- People seen coming and going from the house only every week or so.
- New neighbors' never taking furniture or groceries into the house.
- House or utilities obtained under assumed names with payment made in cash.
- House rented under assumed names with payment made in cash.
- Purchase of very expensive heat lamps for unexplained reason.
- Unexplained and unseasonably high utility bills.
- Property with excessive security (e.g. guard dogs, "keep out" signs, high fences, heavy chains and locks on gates).
- The building of a large green house or tin barn on property where these structures would normally not be utilized.
- Unusual amount of vehicular traffic (especially at night) carrying unknown individuals on and off the property with entrance gates always being locked after entry.
- Large purchases by individuals of fertilizer, garden hose, and plastic PVC pipe, and chicken wire, long pieces of 2x2 lumber and different sizes of pots (utilized for different stages of growing plants). Machetes, camouflage netting, camouflage clothing, various sizes of step ladders (up to 18 to 20 feet) usually painted with green and brown paint, green plastic garden tie materials, cans of green spray paint, large trash bags, lanterns, portable heaters (such as large kerosene heaters), extension cords, heat lamps and fans

Police warn that if you suspect a drug lab is operating in your neighborhood, do not approach and try to do anything. Rather, contact authorities and provide them with the information you have learned.

### **What Happens When You're Rental Property Becomes A "Grow-Op"?**

*"It was a nightmare," says landlady Kyla Brooke of renting out her house in West Sonoma County. "They completely trashed the house -- they covered the floors with plastic, changed the electricity, added fans. They were pouring corrosive chemicals down the pipes. In the end, the walls were covered with mould. And then they threatened to sue us -- for mould." She pauses. "It had been a house in mint condition. If my husband hadn't been a contractor - the damage they did would have cost us \$25,000 or more."*

In the pantheon of Real Estate nightmares, finding that your home or apartment has been turned into a marijuana "grow room" should qualify any landlord for a seat at the head of the table. Yet as medical marijuana laws have spawned a population of legitimate customers seeking respite from chronic illnesses, and police forces increasingly crack down on outdoor farms, more marijuana operations are going undercover in a residential neighborhood near

you. With new high-powered sun-spectrum lighting, new ventilation systems and seeds adapted to interior growth, grow rooms are springing up everywhere -- in rural country cabins, suburban tract homes and urban apartments.

Complicating the issue is that laws relating to pot growing tend to dwell in a gray zone between county, city, state and federal jurisdictions. The federal government still maintains that growing, using and distributing marijuana is a crime, despite the fact that many states have adopted medical marijuana laws.

Even within medical marijuana states where card-carrying members are legally allowed to grow pot for their own use, the shades of gray vary, depending on the local government's interpretation of how many plants or pounds of product constitute acceptable personal use. What's more, some local governments -- like Ukiah -- have prohibited outdoor growing, indirectly encouraging more indoor growing

"Its not a moral issue for most landlords," says Janan New, executive director of the San Francisco Apartment Association. "But it puts the landlord in a difficult place." She says that she had a colleague who discovered that his tenant had turned an apartment in San Francisco into a grow room after the Department of Building Inspection cited the landlord for illegal wiring. "[My colleague] had no right to ask the tenant to leave, but the DBI was going to take him to court," she says. "Sometimes our elected officials try to do a positive thing, but legally the circle's not always closed. For instance, they had never talked to DBI about procedural issues."

Amid all these issues, landlords like Brooke are discovering one downside to the vague new marijuana laws. Whether the grow room was created to treat a grandmother ailing from cancer or to supply a cartel of professional dealers, transforming a home into an indoor farm takes a serious toll. One neighbor of mine, who rented his home to the wrong tenants, found the entire house outfitted with a sprinkler system!

Growers have also been known to rip out interior walls to create open greenhouses or to construct smaller air- and light-tight rooms within a house or garage. The most prevalent alterations include amping up the electrical system to provide for extra lighting, which, if not done properly, can create serious fire hazards. Pesticides and marijuana residue flushed down toilets can have a corrosive effect and ultimately require replacement of the pipes. Wall-to-wall carpets can get seeded -- so that, as Brooke put it, "they [sprout] seeds for the rest of their life".

Security concerns also sometimes exacerbate the damage: To prevent nosy neighbors from reporting the bright lights and ganja aromas to the police, tenants often cover the windows with black plastic -- completely sealing off the space -- and creating an environment ideal for mould, especially with a sprinkler system! (Sound too extreme to be believed? Peruse articles in publications like [cannibisculture.com](http://cannibisculture.com) to learn how the pros create indoor farming, including choosing the right location, buying lighting and installing ventilation.)

Just how big is the issue of residential homes being turned into indoor pot farms? It's hard to say. Some landlords I spoke to said they'd never heard of the problem, while others had just

recently begun hearing stories from fellow property owners or experiencing their own pot-farming tenants.

In British Columbia, where there's a powerful pot industry and relatively loose marijuana laws, the real estate industry recently added mandatory disclosure forms specifically requiring sellers to disclose if the house had ever been the site of a "grow-op," mostly because of potential mould issues. In the Sacramento Valley, police recently discovered a local real estate agent who had made selling homes to pot dealers his niche market.

In the end, Brooke counted herself as "very lucky" for many reasons. "We were really lucky our house wasn't burned down," she says of the substandard electrical system. She also felt fortunate to get rid of their tenant without a legal battle. "He ended up getting arrested," she says. "But he threatened to sue us."

Indeed, when their property becomes the site of a professional operation, many landlords become more concerned about harm to people, not property. A friend of mine, who declined to be named in this article because she was still in the process of getting her tenant out, expressed concern about returning the deposit. Recently, she'd gone from thinking his was a small-time solo gig to believing it was part of a more organized operation run by a boss who had taken over several houses in the area. "I put new floors in and heard he brought in a bunch of pit bulls," she told me. "But part of me just wants to give him his money and get him out of my life. I don't want any retaliation."

As a real estate agent and marriage and family therapist based in the Russian River area, Brooke says discovering one's property is being used for marijuana cultivation isn't as cut-and-dried as it might seem. "It's a very complicated issue," she says. "There's a wide, growing support for medical marijuana, and some landlords are comfortable with growing on their property. But growing marijuana is still a felony, and there's a possibility that the landlord could be arrested, so it's a huge liability issue." And if a neighbor or some other party decides to sue over the presence of a grow room, *"the landlord is more likely to be sued than the tenant."*



She says in the future she'll be more careful when renting to those tenants who fit what she sees as the grower profile. "They tend to be nice, clean-cut young men with a story about their credit," she says. *"They also often pay cash."* She says that because many people in her area have complex credit histories and also pay cash, these tenants actually look like good prospects. *"Generally, they look like very desirable tenants with a couple of oddball issues."*

Gary Harris, a real estate agent and property manager based in Forestville, says in the past couple of months he's encountered two grow rooms: one in a home he was managing and another in a sale where he was the buyer's agent. Harris says that his rental contracts already stipulate that tenants cannot modify the property, but that in the future he too will be

more alert to the tenants themselves. *"The [grower] was not a typical tenant. So next time I think would check out their histories more."*

Now Brooke has added language to her rental contract. *"It says flat out there is to be no pot growing in the house. And I tell them I am responsible for smoke detectors -- I will come and examine them on a regular basis. I've always been a good landlord and now I've become an even better one."*

Yet what works in one county might not work in another. According to Janan New, such additional clauses may or may not be enforceable, especially in a rent-controlled town like San Francisco. *"You can't screen on this -- that would be illegal,"* she says, adding that even the presence of a grow room might not warrant grounds for eviction. *"Damaging a property would be considered part of grounds for a nuisance eviction. But in San Francisco, the damage has got to be pretty egregious."*

### **Danger, Danger Wall Robinson**

There are some very poor renovations being done and then sold as upgrades in homes. The expression "Putting Lipstick on a Pig" (meaning that it is still a pig) applies in many cases. One of the areas that should concern homeowners is where a wall has been removed. There is almost always evidence that this has happened. Look for an unusual layout of an older home - more modern than expected. Look for an arch or beam across the ceiling (which hopefully means that there is a beam holding up the next floor), look for a strip of different colored carpeting or hardwood (used to fill in the space where the wall was), feel a bump or rise in the floor. If the removal has been professionally done, ask for the work permits and bills for the renovation. If these are not available, make sure that your house inspector takes a very long hard look at the attic / second floor/ floor / basement.

Your key concern is that the structural integrity of the house has not been compromised.

We all want open concept space or increased space in some rooms at the expense of other rooms. Be careful that the cosmetics of getting the open concept has not put the whole house at risk.



Credit: Ms Valerie Zinger

## **Industry News**

### **[Resource Site On HST In BC](#)**

BC Government site on HST offers information, resources, and an opportunity to provide your input.

### **[Consumer Impacts of BC's Harmonized Sales Tax](#)**

Business Council of BC study looked at the impact of the HST on BC consumers and households, and concludes that the HST is not a tax grab and that its overall impact on the prices including taxes paid by consumers is very modest. (PDF)

### **[Online Calculator For Drywall Materials](#)**

Fine Homebuilding online calculator will tell you the amount of drywall sheets, joint compound, fasteners, and joint tape that is needed for a remodeling or building project.

### **[20 Kitchen Design Ideas](#)**

Builder Magazine says as other rooms are eliminated from downsized plans, their functions are naturally migrating to the kitchen, placing more pressure than ever on this culinary zone to perform double or triple duty as the home's primary living space.

### **[2011 Design Trends For Kitchen & Bath](#)**

National Kitchen & Bath Association survey revealed key design trends for 2011. Results of this survey suggest there will be some changes in the direction that kitchen and bath styles will take this year.

### **[National Kitchen & Bath Association 2011 Design Finalists](#)**

HGTV Pro displays pictures of the projects selected as finalists in the 2011 National Kitchen & Bath Association Design Competition.

### **[6 Kitchen Design Ideas That Really Cook](#)**

Granville magazine spotlights six kitchen design features you might not have thought of, from practical details to nice-to-have features.

### **[New Code For High Efficiency Plumbing Fixtures Effective October 2011](#)**

The implementation date for the new BC Building Code standards for high-efficiency plumbing fixtures will come into effect on October 3, 2011. The new high-efficiency toilets (HETs) or dual-flush toilets will be required in new residential buildings or when renovations involving plumbing fixtures occur, and whenever urinals are installed, new high-efficiency urinals (HEUs) will be required.

### **[New Smoke Alarm Requirements In 2010 Canadian Building Code](#)**

Canadian National Research Council describes changes in the upcoming 2010 National Building Code for smoke alarm requirements. Homes built to the new Code must have hardwired smoke alarms with a hush button and a 9-volt battery backup that kicks in during power failures, and also requires a smoke alarm in all sleeping quarters as well as adjoining hallways.

### **[Construction Details For Sealed Crawl Space](#)**

Green Building Advisor construction details describe how to seal air and water leaks for a mold-free, energy-efficient sealed crawl space.

### **[Construction Details For Dry Comfortable Basements](#)**

Green Building Advisor online construction details describe how to construct a basement that insulates against water, weather, and radon gas.

### **[Small Sewage Treatment System Now Available In BC](#)**

Janda Busse Small Size Sewage Treatment System is now available in BC. It is designed on the basis of the German industry norm DIN 4261 part 2 and comprises two treatment steps; namely pre-treatment and aeration.

### **[Selecting Insulation For Roofs, Walls, Floors](#)**

Green Building Advisor describes how to choose the right insulation for roofs, walls, and floors.

### **[Worlds Most Creative Buildings](#)**

Oddee Blog on the oddities of the world has pictures and descriptions of the worlds most creative buildings, featuring some truly unique structural creations.

### Services Provided By Pacific West Home Inspections

- Pre-Purchase & Pre-Selling Residential & Commercial Inspections
- Year End Warranty Inspections
- New Home Deficiency Inspections
- Pre-Renovation Inspections
- Wood Burning Appliance Inspections
- Chimney Inspections
- Grow-Op Inspections
- Mould Inspections
- Indoor Air Quality Investigations
- Home Renovation Consultant
- Seasonal Home Check & Maintenance
- Water Quality Testing
- Air Testing
- Radon Testing



**Serving Clients For Over 12 Years**

### About Us

At Pacific West Home Inspections, you will find the home and property information, educational and industry news that will help raise your professionalism and that of the house and property inspection industry as a whole. Dave Brice of Pacific West Home Inspections is the editor and publisher and has been involved in the home and property inspection field since 1998 and the construction industry for over 25 years. For additional information about the services Pacific West Home Inspection provide articles and E-Books that can be downloaded for no cost, go to [www.bchomeinspections.ca](http://www.bchomeinspections.ca) website.

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