

COLUMN FOR JUNE 18, 2005.

HEADLINE; TOP FIVE BUILDING MISTAKES

*Q: I have been reading your column for three years. I am really curious what you deem to be the worst housing mistakes you see, I bet your other readers would be interested.*

A: I had to take some time on this question, you would be amazed at the “creative” workmanship that I see during an inspection and they are not limited to older homes either. Number one on my list has got to be homeowner installed wiring. The basement renovations did not justify paying for an electrician or they read the “book on handyman wiring” Some breaker panels are equipped for double wire attachments to a single breaker, fuse panels are not. The maximum number of outlets on any 15-amp circuit is 12 that means a combination of 12 plugs and light outlets. I have forgotten the number of times I have calculated over 20 plugs/lights on a single fuse, which usually by now is a 20 or 25 amp fuse. This is a fire waiting to happen.

Number two on my list is improper insulation. Water beading behind the vapour barrier on fibreglass insulation fitted in an exterior basement wall. You can bet there is no damp-proofing paper behind this insulation. Perfect climate for mould growth here. Tied at number two are poorly insulated crawl spaces. The majority I see have insulation fitted into the floor joists. You can bet the crawl space is very damp, as most are and the fibreglass batts are loose, wet or hanging down. Here the insulation should be fitted to the foundation walls. Rigid foam insulation works best here. Then clear the dirt floor and lay in a heavy plastic cover over the floor and seal to the foundation, at the footings preferably. A crawl space is a mini basement, heat it and treat it like one.

Number three on the list has got to be the number of times I see interior passage doors from the attached garage not correctly installed or lacking in closers. If everyone took a minute and thought about this, your car emits carbon monoxide. You start it in the winter and think you are safe by opening the garage door a little bit. In reality the cold air, now CM laden will slowly flow into the home. Some time ago I saw a combustion air supply for a furnace vented from a two-car garage. When I asked the owner he said he changed this because the old line going outside was allowing too much cold air into the basement!

Number four has got to be the bathroom fan that is vented into the attic, usually with un-insulated plastic dryer type ducting. You are now supplying a moist, heated air to the cold winter attic. One quick look at these attics and the mould growing on the plywood would shock you. The other issue is you can be assured that there will be ice damming come spring. Bathroom fans are to be buried below the insulation or fitted with insulated flex duct and vented to the soffit.

Number five is your furnace filter. Often installed backwards or they are so old they have pulled thru the paper frame and are now wrapped around the fan housing. Mostly I see them so plugged with dirt it is a wonder the home ever reaches the temperature the thermostat is calling for. Believe it or not, the worst time is in August, not the winter. With so many homes air-conditioned now everyone forgets the filter has to be changed. You are running the same duct system as your furnace. One personal pic-point is those little scented filters that you can put in the floor registers. Now we have two sets of air filters for a system what was designed for one, the filter on your furnace.

Now one of my own real concerns, the lack of combustion air in many homes. During the winter I sometimes take a quick puff of powder to a draft hood around a gas water heater and am surprised how often not all of the powder goes up the vent. Gas and Oil Furnaces, hot water heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces need combustion air to operate. If you have a high efficiency furnace, not all of them are supplied with an external air supply. Take the time during the annual servicing this fall to talk with your TSSA licensed heating technician about whether you have enough combustion air supply. Often times it is as simple as a ten-dollar section of insulated duct brought in from the outside and looped off the floor near your furnace.

Now the answer to last weeks question. What is a cap? The answer was B) the upper half of plate on a frame

wall. Now this week's question. What is party wall? Is it A) a common wall in the hallway of an apartment building B) a non-bearing basement wall separating the family room from the mechanical room C) A separating wall that completely divides a residential duplex. The answer in next week's column.

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