

## Setting Client Expectations

Appropriate expectations are essential for mitigating risk and ensuring client satisfaction. But do you have a good understanding of what you need to explain and how?

Set Expectations - What is a home inspection?

Because most home buyers don't have the time or the forethought to research the inspection process ahead of time, it's important for you to provide them with some basic information. By defining a home inspection for your client, you can make sure they understand your responsibility. In so doing, you decrease the likelihood of receiving a complaint for something outside of your scope.

Providing a definition

When defining a home inspection, consider addressing the following:

- A home inspection is a visual examination of the home's physical structure and systems. Because you can only inspect what you can see, you cannot account for anything hidden from view, such as things obstructed by furniture or personal belongings and things behind walls or below ground.
- A home inspection is a snapshot in time. The defects you find during your inspection are the ones that were present at the time of the inspection. While you will do your best to identify potential future problems and suggest preventative measures, the client will experience future issues in the house that cannot be predicted by your inspection.
- Your home inspection will only cover a representative sample. That means not every outlet or window will be checked.
- Weather may inhibit your ability to inspect certain systems and structures. If, for example, it's raining, you may be unable to traverse the roof. You will note any areas you were unable to inspect in your report.
- Home inspections are not code inspections. While many home defects have roots in code compliance, you don't enforce building code.
- Based on the size of the property, your home inspection will take about [insert number] hours. During that time, you will... [insert brief explanation of how you will traverse and inspect the home].

Being their primary source for their inspection expectations ensures that your clients understand your services. Thus, they're less likely to rely on information from contractors or real estate professionals that may operate under different standards and may not have full understanding of the Standards of Practice (SOP) that govern home inspections in North Carolina.

Remember, in North Carolina our Standards of Practice are established by the licensing board and are set forth in the state statute. While you do not have to include a copy of the SOP you should reference it in your pre-inspection agreement and again in your report. Providing a hyper-link to the SOP if possible is also recommended.

What can I add to the standard inspection?

Most home buyers assume that standard home inspection includes everything and additional services, like pest or pool and spa are part of the standard home inspection. Thus, it is important to explain and offer add-on services when scheduling the inspection rather than waiting for the inspection to take place. By offering such an explanation, you can assert the limit to your liability, which can make you less likely for the client to be surprised to find out during the inspection or for complaints to arise after the inspection.

Giving them the option to accept or decline additional services is a great way to reinforce what is not included with a standard home inspection and shows that the client had the option to add or decline these services.

Discussing add-ons

When discussing add-ons to a home inspection, consider addressing the following:

- While your home inspection will give clients a general idea of the home's condition, it is not technically exhaustive.
- There are certain types of services not included in a standard inspection but are available at an additional cost.
- You offer the following services: [list additional services for purchase]. Ask all your clients if they'd like to purchase such services before the inspection and before they sign your pre-inspection agreement.
- The following services are not included in a standard inspection and are not available at an additional cost: [list additional services that aren't available, if any].

- There are some issues, like asbestos, lead paint or mold for which home inspectors will never inspect because they go beyond the Standard of Practice. If your client is interested in learning more about such issues, they'll have to consult a specialist.

Only by acknowledging what isn't covered by a basic inspection can the inspector appropriately set expectations, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and mitigating risk of potential claims.

Not all home inspection companies offer all types of additional services. In such cases, it's still important for home inspectors to point out what services are not included in their standard inspections.

Inspectors may wish to recommend other companies to provide additional services of interest, such as mold sampling or sewer scope inspections. If you do decide to recommend other companies' services, we suggest asking those companies to name you as an additional insured on their errors and omissions insurance policies. That way, if the client names your business in a suit regarding the additional service, the company that performed the additional service is responsible for your company's defense.

Communication is Key!

With today's technology there's no excuse to not keep the client informed from the initial contact, through the inspection and after the report has been completed and provided to the client. Sending several emails which outline different requirements and needs to both the client and agents can help avoid potential problems. Informing them about the need for the homeowner to make sure access is available to specific areas, the need for pets to be secured and ensuring all utilities are on are some of the main reminder items. Repetition is Key so don't be afraid to repeat your limitations and requirements.

You may also wish to highlight those services that they either accepted or declined as a reminder of what additional services you will be performing as part of their home inspection.

Highlight any restrictions that may be outside of the norm in the report and including a photo is a great way to communicate and remind the client of the conditions you experienced at the time of the home inspection. Garages filled with personal items, attic spaces that are not accessible, safety concerns in the crawlspace, rooms that are locked or occupied all fall into this category.

Better your business

As a home inspector, you walk a fine line. How do you give home buyers the experience they want while protecting yourself from potential claims? By appropriately setting buyers' expectations, you can give your clients quality customer service while managing your risk. Do all you can to set good expectations and both you and your clients are more likely to leave the home inspection happy.