



TONY HARPES/CNS

A thorough home inspection is recommended for everyone before buying a house, and requiring licences will help ensure inspectors are qualified.

B.C. sets the standard for Canada by licencing home inspectors

It took the government a long time to act, but now buyers are better protected

BY OWEN DICKIE AND
BILL SUTHERLAND

It's been a long strange trip for British Columbia's trained and qualified home inspectors and the consumers who depend on them, but last week the B.C. government finally announced it will take action to license B.C.'s home inspectors.

What will it mean for B.C. consumers? Quite a lot, actually. But let's begin with what home inspectors actually do, and how it took Victoria seven years of procrastination, false starts, and foolish positions before it acted on behalf of consumers.

Home inspections began in the early 1970s as a direct response to the growing demand of homebuyers wanting to learn about the condition of a house before purchase. Since then, more and more people — along with an increasing number of lending institutions — have come to rely on a home inspection, because more information equals a more informed purchase decision, which equals fewer surprises.

A home inspection itself is a comprehensive visual examination of the home's overall structure, major systems, components, and property conditions. A properly trained home

inspector will review your house as a system, looking at how one component of the house might affect the operability or lifespan of another. Components that are not performing properly are identified, as well as items that are beyond their useful life or are unsafe.

The idea, of course, is to minimize the risk to your investment, because no one wants to face serious unexpected costs shortly after a purchase.

It was back in 2002 that the Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors of British Columbia — CAHPI(BC) — asked the B.C. government to take action to ensure the highest standards for those seeking to call themselves home and property inspectors. Because in B.C., anyone with a business card could call themselves a home inspector.

At first, it was a lonely effort.

The B.C. government passed, saying it was busy cutting red tape. Then, under pressure, the government announced that prospective

homebuyers in B.C. were covered by the Trade Practices Act and the Consumer Protection Act. But those Acts merely provided recourse after a purchase, not protection in advance of it. They offered nothing to consumers when they needed protection the most — when they were making the biggest spending decision of their lives and were seeking expert advice to aid them in making an informed decision. There were all kinds of excuses offered by the provincial government for not acting, and one by one, we exposed each excuse as sillier than the one before it. Progress was non-existent: In six years, five ministers carried the file.

But then, we reached out to the media for help. And to B.C.'s mayors and councils. And they stepped up for consumers in ways we never imagined.

The B.C. media launched exposes on untrained and unqualified home inspectors. *The Vancouver Sun* wrote editorials demanding high standards, and more than 50 mayors and councils from across B.C. wrote the premier asking for high inspection standards.

Last week, under Solicitor-General John van Dongen, the B.C. government finally responded, announcing that by March 31, all home inspectors in B.C. must meet the required qualifications of CAHPI(BC), the National Certification Program, or the Association of Applied Science Technologists. CAHPI(BC) members have carried Errors and Omissions and General Liability Insurance for years, and now, all home inspectors will have to do the same — if they are going to be licensed in this province.

With this single move, B.C. becomes the provincial leader in home and property inspection standards in this country. It took a long time, but ultimately, with government embracing our recommended approach, B.C. consumers are the real winners.

Owen Dickie is a registered home inspector in Lake Country, and is president of the Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors of British Columbia. Bill Sutherland, also an RHI and is from Kamloops, and is the past-president of CAHPI(BC).

LICENSED HOME INSPECTORS

Good for consumers and real estate

Home inspections make a big impact on a decision to buy

By STEVE MacNAULL
The Daily Courier

Everyone in the real estate industry likes the idea of mandatory licensing for home inspectors.

"Our association has lobbied for it for seven years," said Owen Dickie, president of the Kelowna-based B.C. branch of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors.

"It's a good move for the industry and it's a good move to protect consumers. Consumers are the big winners because they can ask an inspector if they are licensed and they should be able to show you the card that shows: 'Yes, I'm licensed and I've met the rigorous requirements.'"

Recently, the provincial government announced that as of March 31 home inspectors will need a B.C. licence.

"It's about time," said Cliff Shillington, the broker at Re/Max Kelowna.

"A home inspection makes a big impact on a house purchaser's decision, so the people who do that inspection should absolutely be licensed, meet requirements and have continuing education, just like realtors do."

People looking at buying a home are the most likely to hire a home inspector and count on the inspection to catch problems or give the home OK.

Home buyers often base their final decision to buy a particular house on the inspection.

"Most of the home inspectors who work in Kelowna and B.C. are registered in some way with the association they or their employer belongs to," said Dickie, who owns and operates Home Pro Building Inspections.

"But there are three associations, so the provincial licensing will provide a new industry standard."

The B.C. branch of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors is the biggest group with a membership of 250 and grants a B.C. registered home inspector designation.

It's estimated that 400 home inspectors work in the province.

Membership in the association is \$600 per inspector and to get the B.C. registered home inspector designation, individuals have to study six months to two years in order to pass written exams, have errors and omissions insurance coverage and do 20 hours of annual continuing education.



DARREN HANDSCHUH/The Daily Courier

Mandatory provincial licensing for home inspectors is good for both the industry and customers, says Owen Dickie, Kelowna-based president of the B.C. branch of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors.

Someone who is working on the designation can join as an associate member and work as such as a home inspector.

"We'll still operate and have our membership and registration," Dickie said.

"The provincial licensing will be seamless in that if you are registered with our association, you can get the provincial license by paying

\$100, showing you have insurance (which costs \$4,500 annually per inspector) and passing a criminal record check."

Dickie likes that the province hasn't created a new organization because groups already exist.

"What's new is the standardized licensing that protects consumers, so that's good," he said.