

#### 4 Tips for the Buyer of a Previously Owned Home

With new construction still crawling back to pre-recession levels, inventory in the residential housing market is generally low and primarily comprised of previously owned homes. The purchase of these older homes accounted for 93% of all home sales in 2012 and was up another .8% in February, 2013. Home-buying is stressful, especially when in competition for what may be one of only a few homes on the market that fit any given buyer's criteria.

Purchasing homes with a history can present some unique issues, especially if they are not visible to the average homebuyer. Sewer-related problems are potentially one of the most expensive and least evident of those issues. When shopping for a new home, outdated or broken appliances, peeling paint or dirty carpet are a lot easier to spot than plumbing issues. And, while a standard home inspection will cover some of the basics like water damage and water heater safety, other common plumbing problems often go unseen. Potential sewage and drain issues may lurk beneath the surface, unbeknownst to the buyer.

Roto-Rooter cleaned out approximately 219,467 clogged main sewers at residential homes in 2012. Locations nationwide completed repair or replacement work involving excavation on 19,556 main sewers in 2012. Sewer and drain cleaning services account for 59% of Roto-Rooter's work annually. This article will cover everything a homebuyer needs to know about the potential of these common sewer and pipe problems beneath the surface of previously owned homes.

#### 4 Tips for the Buyer of a Previously Owned Home

1. **If it happened once, it will happen again. It is extremely likely that a home would have an ongoing history of sewer-related issues.**

According to Roto-Rooter Director of Plumbing Services, Larry Rothman, "In fact, it's almost a certainty. Some customers require sewer cleaning every six months, while others need us on an annual basis or every two years. The roots from the same problem tree will continue to grow back as long as the sewer pipe has voids and loose joints that allow the roots to get inside the pipe and the problem almost always gets worse over time, requiring more frequent cleanings to keep the roots under control because pipes will shift within the soil causing misalignment between sections."

2. **Sump pump problems may not be evident unless there has been a fair amount of rain.**

Not all basement homes have sump pumps, but most ought to have them to prevent basement flooding. Sump pumps are now a normal requirement in most new building codes for basement homes, but older homes were not subject to the new, stricter codes and the vast majority of older basements are at risk for some level of basement flooding if rainfall is particularly heavy and the ground around the foundation becomes saturated.

Rothman says, "An inspection of the plumbing, particularly the sump system, water heater and sewer line could potentially save a prospective home buyer a great deal of money, potentially thousands of dollars."

3. **A sewer line inspection is not included in the standard home inspection.**

Homebuyers regularly waive this extra inspection in the purchasing process because it requires an additional cost of anywhere from \$250 to \$550. Additionally, many buyers do not know that responsibility for the condition of the lateral sewer line leading from the street to the home lies with the homeowner, not a municipality. Whatever the reason for skipping a sewer line inspection, buyers should reevaluate foregoing this important step in signing a deal. If a problem exists, excavation could be required costing thousands of dollars after the home has already been purchased. "Sewer inspection camera equipment is expensive and often is only utilized by well equipped plumbing companies, but the video inspection service itself is easy to complete and well worth the extra step," Rothman said.

4. **Buyers do not have to disclose information about plumbing problems. Ask questions!**

Know when the home was built; if it is twenty-five years or older, it is more likely to have non-plastic pipes that are at least somewhat deteriorated and more susceptible to root entry. Take note of mature trees, visible root growth and cracked concrete and ask if they are related to any persistent pipe problems.

The benefits of purchasing a previously owned home can be wonderful. However, some of the things a buyer loves most about an older home, the charm, older fixtures, the mature landscaping, can all be indicators of potentially costly problems for the plumbing system below the surface. Home buyers may be focused on kitchen designs, interior paint or landscaping, overlooking the possibility of serious plumbing problems. In fact, about 44% of people purchasing homes call a plumber for one reason or another within the first year at their new residence. Simply avoid any unpleasant surprises before it is too late by being thorough in the inspection and buying phase. Ask the right questions and prevent the added cost of repairs down the road.