



California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA) Press / Media Information

CREIA Advises To Lessen Your Home's "Winter Worries"

With A Professional Inspection

Courtesy of the California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA)

December 1, 2005 (*Palm Springs, Calif*) — The California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA) advises homeowners to make sure their homes are safe for the winter by retaining the services of a professional home inspector.

For many Californians, the only time their furnace or fireplace gets use is during a cold spell in the winter. Because of this limited use, furnaces and fireplaces may not be working efficiently or safely. The following are concerns a homeowner (or potential homebuyer) needs to be aware of...and which a professional home inspector will investigate:

- **Furnace Seals:** Improperly installed or weakened furnace seals are a common occurrence, especially with older systems that have not been inspected in many years. Review of your furnace by a professional home inspector is recommended as a cautionary measure to protect the inhabitants of the home from the possible mixing of combustion gases, such as carbon monoxide, with the circulating air in your home. One way this fatal mixture can occur is through small gaps at the base of the furnace or where tape has come loose at the between components of the furnace. If the base of the furnace is not sealed to the platform or tape joints are loose, this vacuum can pull unsafe exhaust gases from the furnace into the air stream which are then circulated through every heat register in the house.
- **Furnace Work Platform:** According to code, a furnace work platform, at least 30 inches deep and wide, is required along the control side of any furnace installed in an attic. The intent of the code is to provide optimum working conditions for anyone servicing your heater. In addition to a work platform, it is also required when a furnace is installed in an attic that the area have adequate access, be well lighted and meet special venting and condensate drain requirements.
- **Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:** This can occur from a wood fire that had been burning in the fireplace or any gas burning appliance. Carbon monoxide asphyxiates over 1,500 people each year while injuring another 10,000. The colorless, odorless gas can accumulate to dangerous levels in unventilated spaces such as airtight homes. Such poisonings have increased as a result of construction improvements reducing the amount of fresh air movement throughout a home. CREIA recommends the installation of a carbon monoxide detector in every residential structure.
- **Fireplace Dampers:** According to the latest standards, dampers must be rendered inoperable so they stay in the open position if gas log or log lighters are installed. This simple alteration will prevent gas from venting into the living area. With newer fireplace designs, closed dampers can be particularly hazardous because burners can be ignited by the simple flip of a switch. Wood burning fireplaces with gas log units that were in place prior to 1991 are exempt from the newer code. If your fireplace is older than 1991 or if it operates as a wood-burning fixture, then compliance with the new requirement is not mandatory. However, disabling a damper could be as simple as attaching a common C-clamp. While retro-fitting the damper may not be required on an older home, it will improve the safety of the home. If heat loss is a concern, install glass doors.



CREIA Advises To Lessen Your Home's "Winter Worries" With A Professional Inspection (Cont'd...)

- **Ventless Gas Log Units:** "Ventless" gas log units are approved in some states and strictly prohibited in others (such as California). "Ventless" is a misnomer; such fixtures should actually be called "room vented" appliances, since that is truly what they are. All combustion products from these fireplaces are simply venting into the rooms and this poses health and safety issues including excessive moisture condensation, since one of the byproducts of gas combustion is water vapor. A potential consequence of indoor air moisture is fungus and mold infestation, a condition whose adverse health effects have been widely publicized during the past year. The other derivative of gas combustion is carbon dioxide -- if combustion is incomplete for any reason (such as poor adjustment of the gas/air mixture or contact of the logs with the flame), then carbon monoxide can be produced and vented directly into the home, with the potential for disastrous results.
- **Ductwork:** There are potential health hazards from the accumulation of dust and filth in a home's ductwork. While not the case with all forced air systems, in many homes, occupants are unknowingly breathing air that has been circulated over layers of visible filth. In many older homes, forced air heaters may have been operated for years with dirty filters or with no filters at all. The accumulated dust on the inner duct surfaces is often oily or moist and may contain mites or various species of molds or fungus. In newer homes, where air-tight construction methods are employed for enhanced energy conservation, the growth of mold spores has become recognized as a significant indoor air quality hazard. There is no practical way to eliminate all molds and mold spores in the indoor environment; the way to control indoor mold growth is to control moisture.

Make sure you retain the services of a qualified inspector who is trained and experienced in home inspection and is a member of a professional association such as CREIA. Since 1976, CREIA, a non-profit voluntary membership organization has been providing education, training, and support services to the real estate inspection industry and to the public. Inspectors must adhere to CREIA's Code of Ethics and follow the Standards of Practice developed by the association. These Standards of Practice have been recognized by the State of California, and are considered the source for Home Inspector Standard of Care by the real estate and legal communities.

CREIA requires its members to successfully pass a comprehensive written examination of property systems, have performed at least 50 fee-based inspections and complete a minimum of 30 hours of continuing education each year. Members can accumulate credits through various sources of education including monthly chapter meetings, conferences, and other approved activities. CREIA keeps records to ensure that members are complying with the requirements. Educational topics cover a variety of technical subjects including updates and advances affecting the profession of real estate inspection. CREIA is dedicated to consumer protection and education.

Martin Grant, owner and operator of Noteworthy Property Inspections, is a Certified CREIA Inspector member of the California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA). He can be reached at 562-243-0164, martin@noteworthypi.com, or through his web site www.noteworthypi.com.