



HOUSE DEFECT COVER-UPS EXPOSED



Melbourne House Check
for peace of mind

20 fatal traps you need to know before you buy

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A word from us at Melbourne House Check

Dear (soon to be) property owner,

You will no doubt now be considering purchasing a house. It may seem overwhelming considering that it's probably the single largest purchase you will ever make. One of the challenges with purchasing a house is the risk of buying one that has expensive to fix defects. As you are probably aware, some vendors purposely cover up defects in order to offload a house that has problems. In other cases builders perform cheap and nasty renovations hoping to profit from a quick turn-around. At Melbourne House Check we see first-hand these cover-ups and poor quality renovations and believe that it is vital not to assume that all is well when inspecting a house. That's why we highly recommend commissioning a pre-purchase building and pest inspection prior to purchase. Melbourne House Check offer Pre Purchase Building and Pest Inspections which can be conducted either prior to purchase or after a contract has been signed.

You will discover from this booklet, the structured checklist we follow at each and every inspection, whether it's a concrete slab or a suspended timber frame, you will become more aware of the potential problem areas of each house and be more able to identify suspected cover-ups.

At Melbourne House Check we have developed a team of similarly passionate building consultants who are all registered builders with years of experience and we personally guarantee a level of service to each client that is detailed and communicative.

I hope you get value from this booklet and I'd like to ensure you that we are here to help you, and answer any of your questions anytime with no obligation. At Melbourne House Check we believe that if you follow the enclosed checklist of cover-ups from start to finish you are most likely to expose a cover-up or be assured that the house you buy will not present any unknown problem afterwards.

Kind regards,



Brad Aylett-Sloan and the team at Melbourne House Check.

The 20 most common house cover-ups that you need to know when buying real estate

1. Re-painted interior wall linings

This is one of the easiest ways that vendors can cover up signs of defects. Internal walls that have cracked is one of the most common cover ups of defects in houses and while in most cases the painting has covered up minor dents and cracks, there are some cases where it can demonstrate a more serious problem. While having a freshly painted house appears lovely, it simply does not allow a prospective buyer to establish a true history of the house.

2. Re-rendered exterior cladding (brickwork or sheet cladding)

Rendered external walls may be constructed from bricks, cement sheet, blue board or foam cladding. While rendered surfaces can look fantastic and create an impression of an expensive material, they are also expensive to fix. When rendered walls have been newly finished it is difficult to establish whether the application has concealed a larger problem in the structural frame of the house.

3. Brickwork mortar joints that have been patched

Often brickwork above the floor level in houses is non-structural, however when brickwork cracks it is vital that a diagnoses of why it has occurred is undertaken. Often it is impossible to fix without removing the brickwork and starting again, so when it is observed that brickwork has been patched or re-mortared it may be covering-up larger structural footing or foundation issues that could be costly.

4. Locked garages or rooms

This is a common problem. The agent may tell you that they have not been supplied the keys for the garage and that they are coming. Never commit to a house where access to any part of it has not been granted. There have been some widely documented cases in Australia whereby buyers have bought houses without access, to find major structural defects exposed after settlement. Be warned that no access is never acceptable.

5. Locked subfloors and door hatches

Similarly to locked rooms, a subfloor door hatch that has been concealed or fixed shut is a common identifier of many possible defects. When inspecting subfloors it is always a priority to see the underside of the wet areas (e.g. showers, laundry and kitchen etc.) to establish the condition of the frame and whether there are any leaks or decay. It is also vital to inspect the condition of the stumps and footings in general. So when access to this area is denied, it could suggest a cover-up.

6. New subfloor timbers

When inspecting the underside of a floors frame we often see new timbers that have been installed. This may be the product of good maintenance, however it may also be due to a number of other factors that aren't so good. Factors like the vendor having noticed termite activity and has conducted a quick fix or other scenarios where rotten timber due to leaking pipes has been discovered. Either way it is vital to establish why new timbers have been installed.

7. Painted asbestos sheeting in bathrooms

Asbestos can be a real concern in houses build up to the mid 1980's. Commonly it was used in many different applications in houses such as eave linings, exterior wall linings and interior wet area linings in bathrooms and laundry's. Because of the high cost of removal, asbestos is commonly concealed by vendors in order to save these removal costs. Always consider the presence of asbestos. You can learn more about asbestos in houses from the Melbourne House Check website.

8. New skirting boards covering up termite activity

Termites are inherently secretive creatures that are not easily identified by a non-trained professional. One of the most common elements of a house where termite activity is uncovered is skirting boards, and therefor when new skirting board material is identified in a house for sale, it is vital that further investigations are made and a timber pest inspection is conducted. Termites can destroy a house within 4 months and house insurance doesn't cover termite damage. Don't ever assume a house doesn't have termites.

9. Newly plastered ceilings below upstairs bathrooms and toilets

One of the most common house defects is a leaking shower. In cases where the shower is on a ground floor it is often disregarded and ignored, however when the shower is upstairs and the leak has begun to show through the plastered ceiling below, it cannot be ignored any longer. Because it is often such an expensive issue to rectify, ceilings are sometimes patched and painted and showers are not used during marketing campaign in order to conceal the greater problem. It is vital to establish whether upstairs showers are water tight and inspecting the ceiling directly below is a good start.

10. Jam-packed wardrobes that back onto shower recesses

Showers often leak, due to either age or poor workmanship. It is often noticed on walls backing onto showers. Now days during building inspections we use technology such as moisture meters to detect such leaks, however a visual inspection of the walls that back onto showers and wet areas is a good start. These walls often back onto wardrobes that have been jam packed full of stored items, and sometime this has occurred in order to disguise the damp or wet condition. Always inspect the back of shower walls, and if they are full, ask for the stored items to be removed.

11. Locked or concealed access to ceiling spaces

Accessing the roof space of a house is vital. An assessment of the quality of the houses original construction method can be established by this inspection and also the current condition of the timber. Other considerations such as the status of insulation, sarking, the underside of tiles or metal sheeting and many other elements need to be assessed by accessing this area. When there are obvious problems in this area vendors have been known to either restrict access or remove the access opening all together. If you are presented with a house where access to the roof space has been restricted, walk away or ensure access is granted.



12. Packed up subfloor frames requiring restumping

Older houses often require re-stumping. It is important however to establish this prior to purchase. It is fairly easy to conceal this defect by temporarily packing or supporting floor frames by dodgy methods. Vendors often do this, so it is vital that the true condition of a floor frame is established prior to purchase in order for you to budget this cost.

13. Houses that have the power or gas disconnected

Be very cautious about houses that have had the power disconnected. Sometimes it is genuine however sometimes it can be due to the wiring in the house being in disrepair and in need of re-wiring. It may be due to a fire risk also. House rewiring can be an expensive procedure which is why the real reason of power disconnection needs to be established.

14. Houses that have had a recent termite treatment yet no durable notice is displayed

Termite activity in houses is common and when it has occurred, it is vital you are advised. When termite activity has been treated, it is required that a durable notice is advertised in a prominent position in the house. Most commonly in the electrical meter box. This durable notice advises future owners and pest controllers of the previous treatment method, including dates and products that were used. Sometime vendors remove such notices in order to conceal the termite activity. Always look for signs of a previous termite treatment. Speak with us at Melbourne House Check for ways to check this and other possible positions that durable notices may be displayed.

15. Recent renovations yet no mention of them on section 32

Illegal building work is a major problem today for house buyers. TV programs are encouraging DIY and not enough respect is given to the compliance of our building regulations and the commissioning of registered building practitioners. When structural building alteration have occurred in a house it is law to document the work on a section 32 which assures a buyer that the works comply to our building regulations. If you have noticed building work at a house you are considering and it has not been documented on the contract, further questions need to be asked. The local council will be able to clarify if works have been documented correctly. Don't take the risk of the council issuing a notice to you after settlement, as this can be costly and removal of illegal works can be enforced.

16. Upstairs balcony doors locked preventing access to balcony

Balconies are one part of a house that is given particular attention during pre-purchase building inspections. Often these structures are made from timber which fail and decay over time. In some cases access to balconies is denied, whereby doors to balconies have been locked during inspection times. It is vital that attention is given to the condition of timber balconies prior to purchase. This can be a safety concern. Always request access to balconies and ensure a professional inspects the condition.

17. Older houses with lowered ceilings

Often when older houses get renovated the original ceiling and cornice is in dis-repair. Because this is such a costly process it is common that false ceilings are constructed in order to avoid the extra work. Consider this cover-up when looking at houses and consider the cost of rectification to its former condition.

18. Any house where the water has been turned off

A common cover-up in order to conceal leaking pipes is to turn off the water for the period of the marketing campaign. Testing the water is a scheduled procedure during a pre-purchase house inspection in order to reveal any leaks from baths, showers and the underside of sinks and taps. There should be no reason to disconnect the water from a house during a marketing campaign.

19. Basements or sub ground floors where new carpet has been laid

Basements or rooms that are below ground level are often damp. Fixing this issue can be expensive and sometimes vendors disguise such dampness by laying new carpet in these areas. Be aware that new carpet in sub-ground rooms may be such a disguise.

20. Stored items leaning against external walls

Occasionally stored items are commissioned to cover up defects such as cracking brickwork on external walls. If you notice stored items leaning against external walls it is vital that further inspection is conducted. Ask for the items to be removed by the next inspection and return to check the wall. Don't wait until after settlement to find out there is a major crack in the wall.

The importance of having a Pre-Purchase House and Pest Inspection

There are so many styles of houses and so many different construction methods that it makes it extremely difficult for a novice house buyer to identify the primary structural elements of a house, not to mention identification of defects. The structural components of a house are complex. There are just so many problems in a house that can be concealed. Plaster, flooring, roofing and brickwork are all components of a house that cover up the structural elements, and when these parts have been refurbished it is even harder to identify defects, as cracks, water damage and poor workmanship may have been concealed.

Pre purchase building Inspectors have an understanding of all the components that make up a house and are conditioned to investigating those parts of a house that are conducive to structural damage.

Termites are another major problem for house as a house can be fully infested with termites and may not see any signs at all. Houses built on concrete slabs offer termite's undetected access timber frame via small cracks in the slab or built landscaping. They are silent, they never sleep and multiply at an incredible rate.



buyers,
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up
they

If you are considering buying a house without having a pre-purchase inspection you are taking a risk, as we believe that just because a house is presented well, doesn't mean all is ok. In fact there are just so many things that can be hidden it takes more than just an eager eye to identify the problems.

To follow is a list of house elements that are often concealed during marketing campaigns. The rule of thumb when considering purchasing a house is not to assume all is well as quite often it's not right and once you settle the house it's a terrible feeling.

Defects to look out for that may suggest larger problems

1. Cracking in exterior brickwork

This may suggest foundation movement which may be expensive to rectify.

2. Cracking of internal plaster

This may also suggest foundation movement which may be expensive to rectify.

3. Sagging roof lines

Sagging roof lines is never good and often suggests a more major issue. Structural defects are usually a common reason and such defects can be caused by a number of factors such as termites, poor workmanship or deteriorating materials due to old age.

4. Downpipes that aren't connected

Downpipes that aren't connected are extremely common and are commonly dismissed as a low priority defect. Excessive water pooling around footings, whether the footing is a concrete slab or concrete stumps is bad and can cause major structural defects over time in most cases. Always connect downpipes to the appropriate water dispersal system.

5. Water pooling around the outside of the house

Similarly to downpipes that aren't connected, water pooling around the house can do major damage to foundations and footings.



6. Springy internal timber floors

Springy floors may suggest that the house needs to be stumped or worse could mean borer attack as in this image. This is common in older houses, however it is important to establish prior to purchase.

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7. Electrical wiring requiring urgent attention

Having non-compliant electrical wiring in the roof space is dangerous and will present as a cost down the track if you require any electrical work to be undertaken at the house.

8. Doors that close automatically

Doors that automatically close may suggest the house has moved and this requires further investigation. While settling in houses is common, the degree of settlement needs to be assessed prior to purchase.

Your Inspection Checklist of Structural Elements

1. Ceilings

Inspect at all ceiling and consider any joint cracking and the condition of cornice junctions. Also look for any sagging in the ceiling.

2. Internal walls

Look for any cracking and damp in walls, particularly at the back of wet areas such as showers and bathrooms.

3. Floors

Consider all flooring materials. Check the condition of floor tiling, timber flooring and carpeted coverings.

4. Internal joinery

Inspect all joinery, including inside each cupboard and drawers.

5. Built in fittings (built in kitchen and other fittings)

Inspection all built in fittings in kitchen, bathroom and laundry.

6. Bathroom fittings

Inspection of sinks and taps, including an inspection of the underside of basins checking for any leaks or visible decay.

7. Fireplaces, chimney breasts and the outside of flues

Also check the adequacy of hearth and fire place protection.

8. Roof space

Inspect all framing timbers, including rafters, joists, collar ties and props. Assess the serviceability of the insulation and sarking. Check construction workmanship standard of all structural components in the roof space. Check for electrical safety relating to fittings in contact with flammable materials.

9. Subfloor space

Check condition of all stumps. Check construction workmanship standard of bearers, floor joists and the condition of the timber and the underside of flooring. Identify and check the condition of wet area timbers for any leaks or visible timber decay.

10. Windows

Check the condition and usability of all windows inside and out.

11. Doors

Check the condition and usability of all doors external and internal. Check condition of verandas, patios and decks.

12. Roof exterior

Including roof covering, penetrations and flashings.

13. Check rain water goods

Inspect the condition of all gutters, downpipes and water tanks.

14. Walls and fences

Check the condition of all retaining walls and fences.

15. Services

Check and note such services as gas, safety switches, smoke detectors, air conditioners and heaters.

Your Inspection Checklist for Timber Pests

Termites are so destructive in a very short time, so it's important to always conduct a Timber Pest Inspection

1. Check for evidence of live termites in all timber materials, including sub floor, roof space, internal rooms and external walls. Sounding and/or radar devices may be utilised.
2. Check for evidence of termite activity (including workings) and / or damage in all building materials, including subfloor stumps and walls.
3. Check for evidence of a possible previous termite management program.
4. Check for evidence of chemical delignification damage around entire building.
5. Check for evidence of fungal decay and / or damage in all timber materials.
6. Check for evidence of wood borer activity and / or damage.
7. Check for evidence of conditions conducive to timber pest attack in and around the dwelling including the extended site. Most importantly in subfloor and around perimeter of building.
8. Check for evidence of major safety hazards relating to timber pest damage and fungal decay. Particularly in timber balcony structures.
9. Check for evidence of excessive moisture in all areas of the house. Particular attention should be given to wet area walls and subfloor areas.
10. Check for adequate sub floor ventilation.
11. Check for bridging of termite barriers in subfloor space and around perimeter of building. Note any concealed vents or weep holes.
12. Check for untreated or non-durable timber used in a hazardous environment, such as cladding in contact with the ground or landscape timbers buried in the ground.

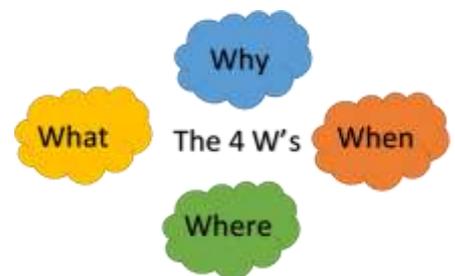


The importance of “The Four W reporting”

It's widely agreed that building inspections prior to purchase are vital in establishing the condition of a house. This way any issues regarding the property can be included in a house defects report which enables the buyer to understand any risks or extra costs that may be involved in buying the property.

We believe that simple identification of a defect alone is not enough.

At Melbourne House Check we follow a method of reporting called the four W's. By following the four W method, we articulate each and every building defect to our client by not only identifying the defect, but also explaining why it is a defect and the consequences if it is not attended to. We outline what the defect is, where the defect is located in the house, why it is considered a defect in the first place and who is the suitable trade's person required to rectify the defect.



Our four W method:

1. What is the defect?
2. Where is the defect located?
3. What the likely consequences will be if the defect is not rectified.
4. Who is the suitable trades person required to rectify it?

Thorough reporting of each and every defect is vital after a building inspection. If you have been presented with the four W's on a house you are considering you will be best equipped to make an informed decision. We call this the four W method and we believe it delivers the most thorough assessment of the houses problems and provides you with the necessary information required to make an informed decision.



FREE Ongoing Advice

At Melbourne House Check we offer free ongoing building advice for the property that we inspect for you. Whether you are planning a renovation or you simply have questions about your house, call us to discuss the details and we will steer you in the right direction.

At Melbourne House Check we take our position as one of Australia's leading house inspection services very seriously and continue to deliver uncompromising and comprehensive inspections to our clients.

We are experienced builders, inspectors and communicators who will work hard for you to ensure you are aware of the status of the house you are considering. Our report is comprehensive and our inspection processes exceed Australian standards.

We are fully licenced and insured with both professional indemnity and public liability cover.

At Melbourne House Check we appreciate your business and assure you of a professional service that extends past the handing over of the report document.



The Australian Standard - At Melbourne House Check we conduct our building inspections in accordance with the Australian Standard of Building Inspections and we pride ourselves in providing the most thorough and comprehensive inspection service available.

Our Blog pages - Visit our Blog pages for interesting case studies of our past building inspections and gain up to date knowledge of what to look for when buying a house.

Our Frequently Asked Questions page - Our FAQ page endeavors to answer most of your questions. If you have any further queries you can make contact with us also from our many contact tabs.

Our Social Media links - You can follow us on our social media pages for regular building advice and building inspection case studies. Our posts are informative and educational and will be a worthwhile contribution to your news feed for anyone considering buying or maintaining a house. You can follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+ from the links at the bottom of each page on the website.

Contact Us at Melbourne House Check

Following us on Facebook will be a worthwhile contribution to your newsfeed.

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The information provided in this brochure is not personal advice, it is general advice. This means that the information has been prepared without taking into account your objectives or needs. Because of this, you should, before acting on the information, consider the appropriateness of the information, having regard to your objectives and needs. We recommend that you obtain a building inspection from a licensed building inspector prior to any purchase.

Melbourne House Check Pty Ltd does not recommend that you make decisions concerning an acquisition based solely on the information in this brochure.

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