



HOUSE DEFECT COVER-UPS EXPOSED



Melbourne House Check
for peace of mind

20 fatal traps you need to know before you buy

Call 1300 729 352

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Table of Contents

A word from us at Melbourne House Check	3
The 20 most common house cover-ups that you need to know when buying real estate.....	4
The importance of having a Pre-Purchase House and Pest Inspection	24
Defects to look out for that may suggest larger problems	25
Your Inspection Checklist of Structural Elements.....	309
Your Inspection Checklist for Timber Pests	30
The importance of “The Four W reporting”	311
FREE Ongoing Advice	32
Contact Us at Melbourne House Check.....	33

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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

One of the most common defects of a house that is concealed are cracks in the internal plaster walls. Cracks in plaster wall linings are commonly patched and painted over and while in most cases the painting has covered up minor dents and cracks, there are often cases where it can demonstrate a more serious problem.

A freshly painted house appears lovely, but it simply does not allow a prospective buyer to establish a history or condition of the house. Cracking can be caused by several reasons. The most common is the house settling, whereby minor cracks appear in the joins of the plaster sheets. These minor cracks often present in houses that are only a few years old, or houses that have been recently restumped. They can also appear in houses that have had recent renovation work. It's when these plaster cracks have been caused by other more sinister issues, for instance the removal of load bearing walls or the presence of active termites which have caused the house to move, that can be a much larger problem and it is vital to establish the cause of any internal wall lining cracking.

It is when this plaster has been patched and painted over that further investigation is required. Investigation such as gaining access to the roof space to establish whether roof load is bearing down at the correct place. It is a common occurrence that vendors remove load bearing walls without the correct relocation of the frame above. If a house you are considering has been freshly painted it is reason to be cautious and further inspection is required.



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 concrete-like material, they are also expensive to fix when cracks appear. When rendered walls have been newly finished it is often difficult to establish whether the new application has concealed a larger problem in the structural frame of the house.

Similar to internal walls that have been freshly painted, consideration also needs to be given to external walls that have been recoated, as it may be concealing defects (cracks) that are expensive to fix. For instance a particular block of land may be unstable, whereby it is subject to movement, or the site may be overly wet due to inadequate drainage which may cause house foundations to sink or rise, causing movement in a house. This movement in most cases causes cracking in rendered walls and when these defects have been concealed it is difficult to diagnose a problem prior to purchase.

If you are presented with a house that has had both the rendered external walls re-rendered and the internal plaster walls re-painted it is vital that you do not assume this work was undertaken simply to freshen the house for the sale. Further investigation is vital.

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. In most cases 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.

There may be many reasons why brickwork cracks. It occurs in new houses and old houses, and while the problem is often a footing/foundation inadequacy, it is often caused by other factors such as poor house design and illegal building works.

Brick cracking simply shows that the building has moved and whatever the diagnoses of the movement, rectifying the problem will inevitably be expensive. It is a common misperception that brickwork cracking can be patched whereby no one will notice during the sale campaign, so therefore look for mortar joints that have been patched. The colour of patched mortar will differ from the original mortar and mortar patches are often stepped in a diagonal direction as opposed to completely vertical.

Each case of brickwork cracking needs to be considered individually. Depending on the age of the house and where the cracking is, will depend on a diagnoses of the severity being established. In most cases brickwork cracking needs to be referred to a structural engineer for further assessment.

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 the keys will be available at the next open house. Whilst the agent may genuinely believe the keys will be provided, it is sometimes the intention of the vendor to not supply the keys in order to conceal a defect or maybe their stored items.



There have been some widely documented cases in Australia whereby buyers have bought houses without access to part of the house, to find major structural defects exposed after settlement.

Some of the reasons access to a room is denied may be to conceal a damp problems, sagging plaster from ceilings, springy floors or termite damage. In most cases it involves garages. No access to the garage or other rooms is commonly disregarded by buyers as a genuine inconvenience, when in fact in some cases it is found to be a deliberate concealment of some sort of problem.

Be warned that not obtaining access to any room or part of a house is never acceptable and that access to all areas should be granted. Never commit to a house where access to any part of it has not been granted.



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 possible defects. Inspection of the subfloor is vital pre-purchase. Elements such as the condition of stumps, bearers, joists, the condition of the soil and most importantly an inspection of the underside of the wet areas need to be conducted to establish the condition of the frame and whether there are any leaks or decay. Areas such as the underside of showers, laundry and kitchen.

From a timber pest perspective the subfloor needs to be inspected in order to detect any termite entry points or subsequent timber pest damage. It is also necessary that any conditions conducive to termite activity are identified. Remember that a subfloor timber frame could be riddled with termites with no evidence of such from the house above.

When inspecting a house to purchase, consideration should always be given to the floor and whether a subfloor space is evident and also whether there is a subfloor access door. Some houses genuinely don't have access to a subfloor space, and while this is a problem in its own right, it may not be a cover-up. When access to the subfloor has been purposefully denied, by way of fixing the door shut or placing stored items in the way, a buyer should always request access be granted so that an inspection of this area can be made.

It should never be assumed that the structural elements of a subfloor space are in order. Inspection of this area is always required.



1. New subfloor timbers

When inspecting the underside of a floor we often see new timbers that have been installed. Replacing old timber with new timber is sometime due to good maintenance and perhaps a recent renovation, however it may also be due to a number of other factors that aren't so good. Factors like termite or borer damage having been discovered and repaired. Often when timber pests such as termites have been identified in the house, simply repairing the damage they have caused is not adequate and will not prevent the termites from continuing to eat the house. Replaced and new timbers may include weatherboards, stumps, flooring, ceiling joists, rafters, bearers and joists.

When new timber has been discovered in any parts of a house that you are considering purchasing, never assume that all is well and that the new timber is the result of good maintenance. Always consider that new timber is the result of a cover-up and a quick fix and commission a timber pest inspector to make a thorough assessment of the surrounding timber.

It is always vital to establish why new timbers have been installed.



6. Painted asbestos sheeting in bathrooms

Asbestos is dangerous fibrous material. Products made from asbestos include fibro sheeting (flat and profiled) guttering and downpipes, as well as other pipes for water, drainage or flues, corrugated roofing sheets, roofing shingles and guttering. Asbestos is a type of building material used in the building industry between the 1940s and late 1980s. Before the health risks were

known, asbestos products were widely used because they were durable, fire resistant and had good insulation properties. The manufacture and use of asbestos products was banned nationally from 2003.



Asbestos can be a real concern in houses built 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. Look for sheet cladding in these wet areas and if you suspect asbestos has been used, it is important to have an expert make further enquiries. Look also for damaged parts of the sheet cladding as it is often at the damaged positions a determination of whether it is asbestos can be determined.

Asbestos-containing materials fall into two broad categories: friable and non-friable. 'Friable' is used to refer to asbestos-containing materials that can be easily reduced to powder when crushed by hand, when dry. These materials can contain high percentages of asbestos fibres and are more likely to release these

fibres into the airborne environment when disturbed. As such, they pose a greater risk to health. Friable asbestos materials must only be handled and removed by an asbestos removalist with a licence. Always consider the presence of asbestos. You can learn more about asbestos in houses from melbournehousecheck.com.au

8. New skirting boards covering up termite activity

Termites are a destructive timber pest that can do incredible damage to houses. They are inherently secretive creatures that are not easily identified by a non-trained professional, therefore identifying them prior to purchase for most house buyers is extremely difficult. One of the most common elements of a house where termite activity is uncovered is the bottom plate of a timber frame throughout the house. The bottom plate is an essential part of the house frame that is located behind the skirting board, so in most cases when termites have invaded the bottom plate, they have also eaten the skirting board material. This is often the first signs that termites are active in a house, when a vacuum cleaner has pushed up against the skirting board and the skirting board has collapsed due to the termites having eaten the inside.



In some cases when a house owner discovers termites are active in the house, quick and nasty cover-ups are conducted whereby skirting boards are replaced in order to conceal this activity.

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. Skirting boards often show a house's age, having been kicked and battered, therefore a 60 year old house that has perfectly presented skirting boards is the sign that further investigation is required, meaning a

professional timber pest inspection is required.

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. As a builder of some 20 years I notice that not enough respect is given to the waterproofing of wet areas, particularly the base and walls of showers. In cases where the shower is on a ground floor it is often disregarded and ignored and in most cases is never discovered, however when the shower is upstairs, leaks begin to show through the plastered ceilings below.

This defect of water leaking through the shower waterproofing membrane is extremely expensive to fix. In most cases it means removing the shower completely and starting again costing tens of thousands of dollars.

Identifying this defect in a house that is for sale is difficult. If the vendor is aware of the problem, they may prevent using the shower in the lead up to the sale period and repaint the ceiling below it in order to conceal the problem completely. Often water stains are difficult to hide completely, so have a thorough inspection of the area. Take note of the ceiling space directly under showers and wet areas, specifically looking for newly painted surfaces. If you are suspicious of a past problem, tests can be done in order to check.

If the house is only one level and there is a subfloor space and you are suspicious of the shower leaking, an inspection of this area is required to establish a water tight wet area.

It is vital to establish whether upstairs showers are water tight and inspecting the ceiling directly below is a good start.

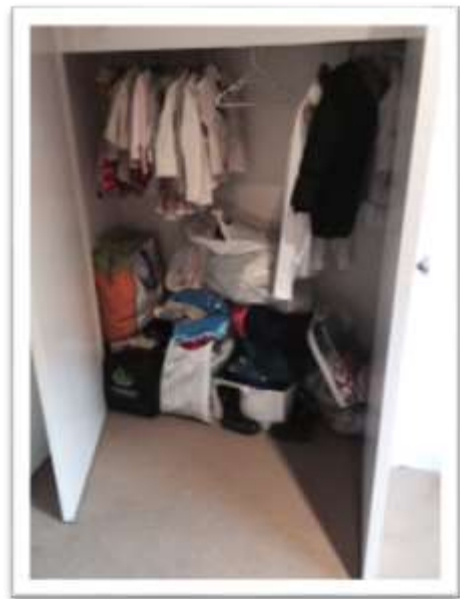


10. Jam-packed wardrobes that back onto shower recesses

As you now know showers often leak. This is caused by either the old age of the house or poor workmanship when it was built or renovated. A further element of the house that is commonly affected by a leaking shower are the walls surrounding the shower. If there is a leak in the wall or floor of the shower it will eventually show on the surrounding walls, most commonly on the lower section of the wall backing onto a shower.

These walls that back onto showers are commonly inside wardrobes, and because wardrobes are often full of clothes and stored items, inspection of the walls are commonly overlooked by buyers.

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. Look for wet carpet, mouldy plaster walls and swelling timber skirting boards. You may even smell a damp area when you open the wardrobe doors.



It is vital that you inspect the back of shower walls, especially if they are concealed in a wardrobe. Remember, if the wardrobe is full, either remove some items yourself or ask for the stored items to be removed for a more thorough inspection.



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, electrical wiring and many other elements need to be assessed by accessing this area.

When a vendor is aware of problems in the roof space area they have been known to either restrict access or remove the access opening all together. Occasionally after a renovation a builder may inadvertently remove the ceiling access hatch. If this has occurred all may be well, however if a ceiling access has been intentionally removed it would almost certainly be a cover-up and caution should be taken. In some cases access to the roof space can be obtained in order to inspect the roof space, however permission from the vendor would need to be granted.



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. In most cases in older houses red gum timber was used for stumps, and while it was a durable material, it's life span was only around 60 -80 years. This means that any house that has the original red gum timber stumps may be requiring the stumps to be replaced.



Over time the timber will have started to decay and sink into the ground, causing the house to drop. Were this may have been obvious, attempt may have been made to pack the house back up to its original height. This can be noticed when conducting a subfloor inspection. It is important to establish whether restumping is required prior to purchase however.

It is fairly easy to conceal this defect by temporarily packing or supporting floor frames by dodgy methods. Vendors often make attempts to pack up floors with temporary methods, 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.



A house that is in need of restumping should not be overlooked, however differing costs to restump apply depending on how much room there is underneath the house.

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.



Occasionally the agent may tell you that the power and gas was disconnected after the tenant moved out and that that is the reason for no power, however because it is very simple to reconnect the power in order to market the house, we suggest you do not accept this. Often power and gas is required in order to test electrical appliances like air conditioners, heaters, hot water services, lights and power points.

When power or gas has been disconnected it may be covering-up gas leaks or electrical problems such as a house needing to be re-wired. Older houses that need re-wiring is common, however

newer houses shouldn't, so always be alerted to houses where there is no power or gas connected.



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

Termite activity in houses is common. Having termites treated by a professional is also common, but when it comes to selling a house it is ethical to advise the future owners that termites were active in the house and that a treatment was undertaken to eradicate the termites. It is important for future owners of the house to be advised of when the termites were treated, who conducted the treatment and the particular chemical that was used to treat them. This disclosure is displayed most commonly via a durable notice displayed in the electrical meter box and sometimes in a prominent location under the subfloor of the house.

Sometimes vendors remove such notices in order to conceal the termite activity and hoping that potential buyers are unaware of the damage that has been caused. Always look for signs of a previous termite treatment. There are ways to check for termite treatments 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 it is law to document the work on a section 32 which assures a buyer that the works comply to our building regulations.

According to recent data, up to 25% of homes for sale have some sort of illegal building. Illegal building work is work to a house that is undertaken without the required permits or compliance certificates. Amongst the most common, is electrical wiring that has been tampered with, home-made plumbing, and internal load bearing walls that have been removed.

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 may 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.



Often timber balconies decline in condition faster than the house itself. Timber that is exposed to the elements year after year can reduce in strength and even though it may look good from a distance, the real condition may not be good at all. There have been many cases where balconies and decks have collapsed under the weight of a group of people.

During a pre-purchase inspection it is vital to gain access to all balconies whether they are timber or concrete in order to examine the condition of the materials. If the balcony is above part of the house below it is important to check the waterproof qualities of the balcony as it is with a shower in defect no. 9.

Restricted access to balconies and decks can result in 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.

You may have noticed renovated period homes that have been modernised inside. Straight walls and flat ceilings. In some cases the old ceiling has been simply left where it was built and a new ceiling was erected at a lower level. This may not bother some house buyers and it may not be considered a defect by others, but if cover-ups like this have been conducted we believe it should be noted.



A false ceiling can often be discovered when accessing the roof space hatch. If not when accessing the roof space a simple measurement can be taken of the ceiling height at the access hatch and applied to other rooms for comparison.

Consider this cover-up when looking at houses and consider the cost of rectification to its former condition.

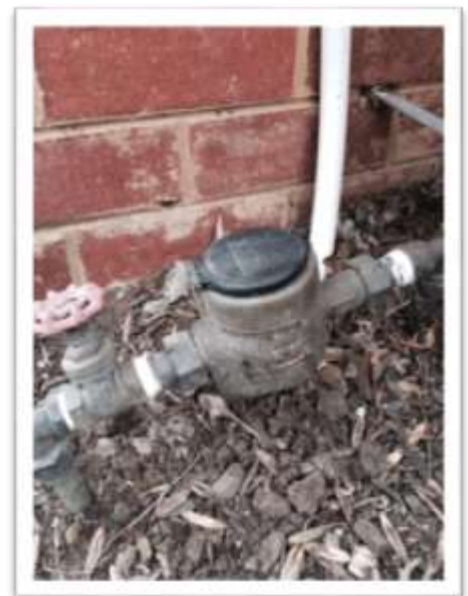


18. Any house where the water has been turned off

A common cover-up in order to conceal leaking pipes is to turn off the water for the period of the marketing campaign. Similar to the power and gas being disconnected, water that has been turned off needs to be considered as a cover-up. 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 and without water running under pressure through the pipes, testing cannot be done.

A common test at pre-purchase is to flood the shower base with water. This is done by temporarily blocking the waste and filling the shower base with water. After a 30 minute period if the shower was defective leaks would be evident from underneath. Other important water tests are undertaken at each basin in the house and it is important also to test the flush of each toilet.

Because plumbing work to an existing house is a costly element to rectify, it is vital that as many tests are made prior to purchase. If the water is not turned on be very cautious and always question why.



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

Basements or rooms that are below ground level are often damp. In older houses it can be caused by rising damp and in newer houses it can be caused by poor workmanship whereby waterproofing of floors and walls has been conducted poorly or there is inadequate drainage on the outside of the house.

Fixing this issue can be an expensive process post construction and sometimes vendors who are faced with a sub-ground damp problem simply disguise such dampness by laying new carpet in these areas. Be aware that new carpet in sub-ground rooms may be such a disguise. If you are presented with new carpet in sub-ground rooms further investigation is vital.



20. Stored items leaning against external walls

Occasionally stored items are commissioned to cover up defects such as damage on external walls. Exterior brick walls that have cracked are a common element that is concealed by stored items. Stored items leaning against a house may look innocent however it may also be concealing a major defect. If you notice stored items leaning against external walls it is vital that the items are removed and a 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,
you
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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

Cracks in brickwork occur when forces either externally or internally within a building, or as a result of chemical changes within the building's materials are greater than it can withstand. Cracking and movement can be structurally dangerous. Differential movement throughout a building may be a consequence of poor design, ageing or changing environmental conditions to which a rigid building cannot adapt without fracturing.

The form and positioning of cracking depends upon the building's weak points, particularly around doors and windows and where floor and roofs connect to walls. Other factors are the size, shape, and position of the crack, the age of the crack indicating repetitive movement and crack widening, suggesting settlement or support failure.

Reactive soils e.g. clays are susceptible to expansion and contraction with varying soil moisture content. Non-reactive soils such as sands, silt and gravel are susceptible to shear and loadbearing failure.

Common causes of brick cracking may include:

- Consolidation of foundations as water is expelled from the soil under the weight of the building.
- Shear failure of foundations when foundation soil is forced from under footings because of gross overloading, excavation or excessive wetting.
- Building on inadequately compacted fill.
- Building on variable foundations resulting in differential consolidation and uneven settlement.
- Excessive wetting due to garden sprinkler systems, watering beds situated close to external walls, blocked or leaking downpipes or stormwater drains. Other factors could be surface run-offs from raised street or footpath levels, underwater streams or old water courses.
- Rusting reinforcing steel in masonry lintels, arch bars, wall ties, or bolts displacing surrounding masonry can create stepped or horizontal cracking from the point of embedment.
- Where old pitched roofs have not been adequately secured or supported, the roof will tend to sag and spread especially at the eaves causing external and internal cracking at the top of walls.
- Being a clay product, bricks have a natural tendency to expand for years after leaving the kiln, depending upon the type of clay used and their subsequent exposure to moisture. Expansion joints are necessary to prevent cracking, bowing and arching.

Whenever structural cracking and movement appear substantial or significantly worsen, a qualified and licensed Structural Engineer should be consulted for further advice.

2. Cracking of internal plaster

Most small cracks in plasterboard walls are not serious and are caused by seasonal expansion and contraction of the wood framing in houses over time. They're often found at the corners of window and door frames, and can be patched. Larger cracks in walls however, can indicate structural or foundation problems. If cracks in walls exhibit the following characteristics, it may suggest larger problems and a building inspection should be commissioned prior to purchase:

- The crack has a 3mm or wider gap.
- One side of the wall is higher than the other.
- Doors no longer close in the frame.

3. Sagging roof lines

Sagging roof lines is never good and often suggests a more major issue. Roof lines should be arrow straight. If you can see a dip, curve or swag on the peak when standing in the street, the roof has a problem. It might be something basic that you can handle yourself, but it's likely to be more complicated and require intervention by a professional. 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.

Problems with and repairs to a sagging roof should be evaluated by professionals. It might be a simple fix that can be done by jacking up loose rafters, adding struts or, more economically by replacing iron or tiles. The extent of repair can be somewhat difficult to determine, but if you see obvious broken rafters, joists or beams, consult with a professional to ensure that the roof is repaired properly.

4. Downpipes that aren't connected

Stormwater is the water draining off a site from the rain that falls on the roof and land, and everything it carries with it. Downpipes that aren't connected are extremely common and are commonly dismissed as a low priority defect, however, excessive water pooling around footings whether the footing is a concrete slab or concrete stumps, can cause major structural defects over time in most cases.

Council receives a number of complaints each year regarding stormwater run-off causing a nuisance to adjoining or downstream property owners. Land owners are required by law to maintain their stormwater pipes, gutters, downpipes, stormwater pits and any other components of approved stormwater drainage systems. These should be kept in a good condition and comply with any Council requirements.

5. Water pooling around the outside of the house

Similarly to downpipes that aren't connected, water pooling around the house can cause major damage to foundations and footings of a house. Poor drainage is a common problem.

Site conditions and the correct water flow such as the location of retaining walls, paths, swimming pools, should all be considered when purchasing a house. If the ground slopes towards the house, paths with spoon drains should be provided. It is also important that drains are situated uphill of the footings so as to direct water around the house and away from the footings. Stormwater and roof water drainage should be considered and the flow of water from adjoining properties should also be considered.

6. Springy internal timber floors

Springy floors may suggest that the house needs to be re-stumped or worse could mean borer attack as shown in this image. This is common in older houses, however, it is important to establish any damage prior to purchase. Bounciness is usually caused by undersized floor joists. Sagging can also be the result of undersized joists or an undersized bearer.



If the joists and bearers are rotten or damaged they may need to be replaced, and the moisture problems that caused the decay should be addressed. Assuming the joists are in good condition, the solution to both sagging and bounciness problems is to reinforce the floor by either beefing up the floor joists or adding new posts and/or a new or reinforced support beam where this is practical. Either way if floors are springy, it's important to establish the cause prior to purchase.

7. Electrical wiring requiring urgent attention

As houses age, the electrical wiring can become worn out, causing dangers within the walls, roof and subfloor that homeowners cannot always see. For example, hot light fittings in contact with insulation or close to timber. Another common problem is loose connections. From the electrical panel all the way into the home's lighting and outlet circuits, poor connections can not only be an irritation but can actually be dangerous. House buyers should become aware of what the safety concerns are of old wiring in houses and learn about five of the most common electrical wiring warning signs being:

1. Circuit breakers and fuses that regularly go out.
2. Diming and flickering lights.
3. Buzzing, charred, or discoloured outlets and switches
4. Burning smell.
5. Sparking switches and outlets.

8. Doors that close automatically

Doors that close automatically 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.

Follow us on Google Plus and read our recent Google reviews.



Contact us at Melbourne House Check by
emailing
enquiry@melbournehousecheck.com.au or
call 1300 729 352

Disclaimer:

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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