

Water, Water Everywhere: Exterior Water Management

As a Home Inspector a portion of my inspection time is spent looking for moisture damage, the causes of moisture damage and potential areas of water problems. With the recent rains and to follow-up on a few items in my past articles, I decided to write about water issues. Let's start with the exterior of the house.

Something as simple as the grade or slope away from your foundation can have a huge effect on your home's structure, and moisture in your basement or crawlspace. Water that is allowed to seep into the soil around the foundation can cause the soil to swell, or settle excessively. This can lead to foundation and concrete slab movement, drywall damage and at its worst, even structural damage. Keep the slope away from your house at a minimum of 1/2 inch per foot for five to ten feet. Just remember you do not want the soil to be in contact with siding.

Concrete sidewalks, driveways and patios can settle over time. If there is settlement that has the concrete sloping towards the foundation, repairs should be made. The sidewalks, driveways and patios are large collection areas that will move a lot of water towards the house. These repairs are not cheap or easy but removing water from around the structure is worth it.

Newer houses have a sump pit in their basements. There is a perforated pipe at the base of the foundation footing that collects water that is lying against the foundation. This pipe directs the water to the sump pit. If the pit collects water, have a licensed plumbing contractor install a sump pump to direct the water out of pit and away from house. This helps keep the soils around the foundation stable. Do not be alarmed if your pit is dry and stays that way, most homes I inspect have dry pits with no sump pump installed. Just keep an eye on the pit and take action if there is water.

One of the best controls for site drainage is gutters and downspouts. If you do not have gutters installed around your house, consider adding them. Gutters are a great way to direct site drainage away from the house. If you do have gutters, make sure the downspouts are extended five or more feet away from foundation. Do not let landscape edging block the flow of water. Try to extend the downspouts past planting beds. Keep your gutters clean, ideally you will clean them in late fall and spring.

Landscape irrigation can be a large source of water around the house. If you have an irrigation system periodic inspection is recommended. Do not over-water your landscape. Water running across sidewalks, or pooling in grassy areas are signs of over-watering. Verify that the sprinkler heads are not directing water toward the house. Water spraying on the house may damage siding and cause moisture in basement or crawlspace. Check the valve box and back-flow valve for leaks. Some of

the biggest water problems I found come from unnoticed leaks in these areas. If you have a drip system near the foundation make sure water is directed toward the plants. Older established planting may not need to be watered as regularly as when they were planted. If you can cut back on the amount of water these plants receive you will help the house and your water bill.

Water finds many ways to enter and damage your house. Following these steps will save your house from water damage, saving money and the house's value for years to come.