

Foreclosed Home Inspections

Lately it seems that every other inspection I perform is on a bank owned or foreclosed house. If you are in the market for a foreclosed home, there are a few things to remember prior to making an offer and having the house inspected.

Access to the property in our area is easy to set up for the local home inspectors. We will call the listing real estate office and make an appointment to inspect the property. When the inspection is set the listing office will usually give us the lock box code, sometimes the listing agent will meet us at the property to let us into the house. Many times with a bank owned property the bank will add paddle locks to items like garage doors, electrical panels and crawl space access. When speaking to the inspector let him know if you observed paddle locks that restricted your access to areas so that they can confirm with the listing office that keys to these locks are on site. I have learned over the years to ask the listing company if there are paddle locks, but have been caught on site and unable to inspect areas because of restricted access.

Often foreclosed properties have been winterized. This is the process of turning off the utilities, electric, gas and water. The plumbing system is then drained and environmentally safe antifreeze is added to the toilets and sink drains. For the inspector to give you the greatest amount of information about the house, all utilities should be turned on. When the house's utilities are turned on it is your best interest to have the house properly de-winterized. By this I mean that the water be turned on and the plumbing system pressurized. When the house is de-winterized the bank should also arrange to have all the pilot lights lit, typical examples are water heaters, furnaces and any fireplaces. It is normally beyond the scope of the home inspection to have the inspector light pilot lights. If the inspector does light the pilots many times they will charge an additional fee.

Many times the house is in foreclosure due to no fault of the previous owner, but other times the house is lost due to dangerous drug use like methamphetamine (meth). Meth production and use in a house can leave lingering contamination that can have physical effects on you or your family when you begin to live in the house. Because of the potential health risks, it is a good idea to have the house sampled and/or tested for meth. Sampling can give you a rough idea if meth has been processed or consumed in the house, most samples will read to 15 micrograms per 100cm² (µg/100cm²). Sampling is generally less expensive than testing and is a good first step if you have doubts about the house. Sampling can be done by an industrial hygienist or a few home inspectors in the area, including me. Per Colorado regulation the only testing for meth can be preformed by a qualified industrial hygienist. Testing is a far more rigorous lab process that can find

concentrations below $.5\mu\text{g}/\text{cm}^2$. Testing is the only way to find whether the house is completely clean.

With all this in mind it is a good idea to speak to your Realtor® about the inspection objection deadline. I find that adding a few days to the deadline will allow for the house to be properly de-winterized, get all access questions answered and have any additional testing performed.

There are many great deals to be had if you are looking at a foreclosed property, just make the time and ask the right questions before you have the home inspected.