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Inspections Are Smart Moves

By Susie Steckner

Inspections have become a matter of course in the home-selling process, and buyers today can find firms that provide one-stop shopping for a range of needs.

Companies are offering both general home inspections and termite inspections, combining the two most requested services for convenience. Companies also are providing services such as examining pools and spas, looking for mold, and conducting environmental inspections to spell out potential hazards in the area.

Although inspections typically are requested for previously owned homes, some companies are targeting buyers who are purchasing new homes, to head off problems early.

During the past housing boom, some Valley buyers were purchasing houses without inspections in the race to get their dream homes. But professionals caution against this, no matter the market, and say at a minimum, buyers should request general home and termite inspections.

Buyers and sellers also should work with inspectors certified by the state, said Frank Dickens, a veteran Realtor with Re/Max Achievers in Scottsdale and president of the Arizona Association of Realtors. He said certified inspectors are held to a higher standard and are more accountable for their work than an uncertified inspector or, say, a buyer's contractor friend.

General home inspections range in price but start at a few hundred dollars. These typically take a few hours and some companies can provide results, with photographs, on-site or at least within 24 hours. Inspectors look at the home's major systems, including the roof, floors, heating and cooling, plumbing and electrical, and built-in appliances.

The scope of a general inspection is limited, said David Swartz, owner of Advantage Inspection Service in Phoenix, who also serves on several committees of the Arizona Board of Technical Registration, which certifies home inspectors.

"We are like going to your family doctor for a checkup," he said. "In a lot of cases, people expect us to be experts in every single specialty, and we're not."

Based on an inspector's findings, buyers may want to seek out other professionals, such as those of a roofing company.

Buyers also will want to get a termite inspection, which may not be offered by the home-inspection company. The termite-inspection cost can be about \$50 and up.

It's important to note that these inspections are only visual and specific to the date of the inspection, said Randy Hooker, designated broker with Dreamcatcher Realty in Gilbert. Aside from looking for infestations, inspectors also are looking for wood rot, wood-to-earth contact and excessive moisture, he said.

Inspection information is filed, and open to the public, at the Arizona Structural Pest Control Commission.

Once the general home and termite inspections are complete, buyers might want to consider an environmental inspection, Swartz said. This covers a laundry list of potential hazards, such as land fissures, radon-gas exposure and proximity to things such as Superfund sites and airports.

Some companies today also are offering new-home inspections, which can be conducted during construction or before the builder's warranty expires.

Once an inspector is hired and the work is complete, buyers need to consider all the findings, Swartz said. The buyer may decide to live with certain problems, but if the home is put on the market later, future buyers may not be willing to do that. "Anyone who doesn't follow through with recommendations is a bit at risk," he said.