

Buyers beware of flipped houses

By Dan Howard
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

Wow, everything looks shiny and bright. The carpet smells like new. Heck, the paint is so fresh you want to touch it to see if it's still wet. Everything is so up to date that you are ready to move in tomorrow without even a home inspection.

The bottom line is that no matter how good the house looks now, every flipped house starts with a home that's in distress. The distress could be the result of foreclosure, short sale, owners with health challenges, fire or major insurance loss. In almost every instance, the property was in bad condition and you are in the hands of someone with unknown skills and ethics to sell you a quality house to call home.

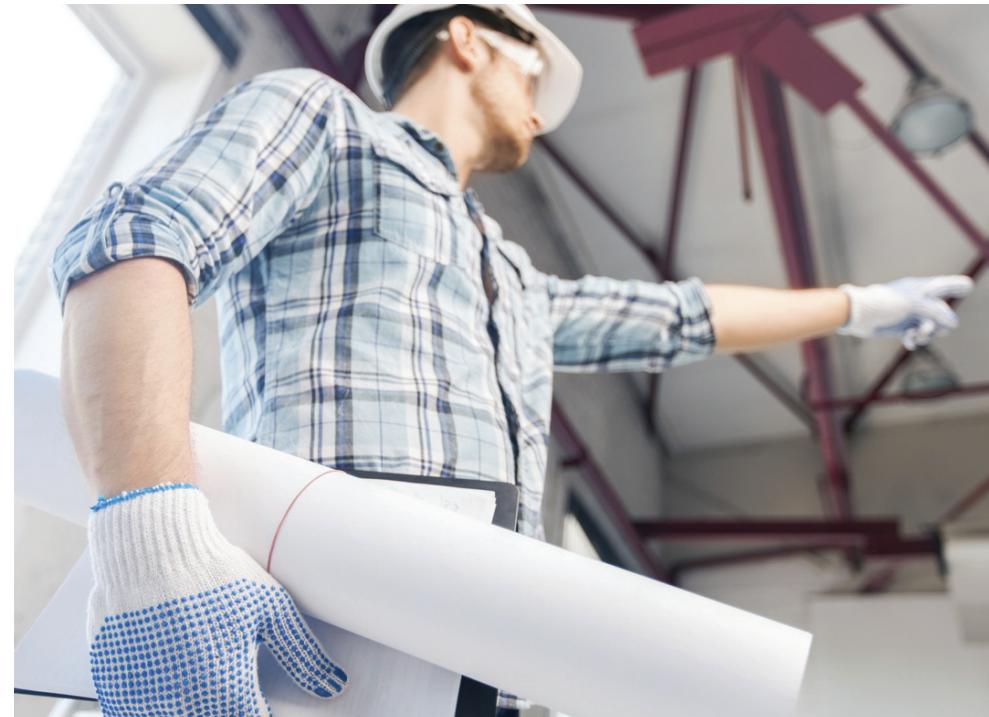
Imagine the perspectives of the flipper and the contractors that work on the house. The flipper knows that on the day of closing, any short cuts and cover-ups become the buyers problem and not theirs. From the contractor's point of view, the buyer does not matter. The contractor works for the flipper and there is no warranty for their work past the day of closing. Some contractors may do a good job, but not every flipper or contractor is motivated to sacrifice profit for doing a quality job.

MOST COMMON DEFECTS FOUND IN FLIPPED HOMES

Badly done work: This can range from decks and steps not properly secured to a house wall to improper plumbing and wiring. The work is only as good as the person doing it will do on any particular day.

Mold: Houses that are flipped were often empty for extended periods of time. Fresh paint and open windows do not undo mold growing inside or behind the walls of a house. Mold can affect future resident's health and cost tens of thousands of dollars to correct. Finished basements and interior french drains are examples of high risk conditions for mold.

Basement Leaks: If I had a dollar for every flipper who claimed that there were previous water problems, but adding a downspout or coating a basement wall with waterproofing has solved them, I could take a month off work. It usually doesn't work that way. Have a skilled and experienced professional check out those claims.



Sewer Problems: These are not easy to find. Flippers can have the sewer snaked out before putting a home on the market. There is no way short of having the sewer checked with a sewer camera for any buyer or home inspector to recognize a damaged sewer. If the house has high risk conditions such as terra cotta sewer pipes or trees in the yard, having a plumber check the sewers with a camera could be the best \$250 a buyer can spend.

Odors: Sewer backups, fires, pet urine, improper plumbing and furnace installation can each be a source of odors. Open windows or temporary deodorant treatments can hide odors that you do not want to live with. Cold weather is another condition that could cover up a nasty warm weather surprise of a smelly or unhealthy house.

Gas Leaks and Gas Line Defects: Leaking pipes, missing gas valves and improper materials are all examples of these serious and dangerous problems.

Improperly Installed Vent Systems: Hot water tanks that do not have proper flue liners installed after a high efficiency furnace is installed are probably the most common example of this defect. Loose vent pipes and blocked chimneys are two other examples common to flipped houses.

Electrical Issues: Hidden connections, dangerous splices and improper wiring above suspended ceilings are common. Shortcuts, that occur when an amateur adds on to existing wiring, can be a fire waiting to happen.

ADVICE FOR BUYERS CONSIDERING A FLIPPED HOUSE

- Beauty is only skin deep. Look at the quality of the work that is in the house before it becomes your home.
- If it smells, the smell will not get better on its own. If the house is cold or the windows are open when you view the home, make sure that you visit the home while it is closed up and warm.
- New does not mean right. Improper installations, improper products chosen for a solution or defective materials can be in any home.
- Consider hiring an experienced inspector with construction experience before you purchase the house.



Drug Houses: The manufacture of illegal drugs in a home can leave toxins that can poison a family moving into a home. Meth houses are an example of foreclosures that become flipped houses.

Sometimes a bargain is not the best deal for buyers. Be a skeptic when you consider purchasing a flipped home. Remember, the flipper is off the hook the day of closing and that's when all of the covered up defects become the new homeowner's problem. A flipper's financial incentive is to spend the

least amount of their own money to get the most amount of yours.

For more information and helpful links to important related materials, go online to www.Envirospect.info/FlippedHouse.

Dan Howard is the owner of Envirospect. For an environmental consultation call 724 443-6653. For more information go online and visit their website at www.Envirospect.info. Email questions to: Dan@Envirospect.info. Like us on Facebook or connect @DanHoward251.