

Inspecting the Country Property

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Choosing a home inspector for a rural property purchase is critical. Country property inspections present additional challenges that only a specialized inspector can provide. The water supply, wastewater disposal, heating and electrical systems are often different than one would find in a residential area with town services.

As with any specialist, check the home inspector's references, professional association status, current and ongoing education and, most importantly, check their practical experience in the field. Rural property inspections require a specialized knowledge of well and septic systems, and a familiarity with alternate forms of heating such as wood, ground source, oil or propane. For these reasons, you need a professional that is trained in these areas.

Inspection of the waste water system (septic) of a country property is very important. Unexpected costs of repairing or replacing a system can result if the system has failed or is undersized. Most home inspectors are not qualified to report on the current condition of your septic system but should offer an opinion based on physical observations. For proper evaluation, a waste water inspector will do a full septic inspection including excavation of the holding tank access hatches and core sampling of the leaching system. Pumping of the holding tank is also recommended but only after

the initial inspection. The inspectors will also assess the capacity of the current system to make sure it can support your current, and future, needs. Your real estate agent or home inspector can provide you with the names of qualified waste water inspectors.

The drinking water supply is equally important. Water sampling and testing is usually taken care of by your real estate agent in conjunction with the local health authority. The home inspector will test the well system, including the pressure tank and electrical connections to the pump, and explain the operation and function of the system. If a problem is suspected, recommendations will be made for further evaluation by a qualified professional or the local health authority.

Since natural gas is not available in most rural areas, alternative heating fuels such as propane, oil and wood are commonly used. The age, location and current condition of fuel storage tanks and distribution lines is an important part of the inspection to ensure the health of the occupants and the safety of the environment. The Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) provides guidelines for the safe installation of above ground, or the disposal of underground fuel storage tanks. It is important to determine if the property has any underground tanks that are in use, or have been abandoned as they may pose an environmental hazard, or impact your home insurance. All underground fuel storage tanks must be registered with the Ontario government. For more information visit <http://www.tssa.org>.

Heating systems in rural homes range from conventional forced air oil-fired or electric furnaces, to wood stoves, boilers, radiant water systems, heat pumps, or solar panels, to name a few. It is important that your inspector is knowledgeable about these different systems and is able to advise you on their relative merits and features.

Home inspection for rural properties requires more expertise (and time) than a traditional inspection. To ensure you get the information you need to make an educated purchase decision, take the time to search out an inspector that is experienced with country properties.

Send your comments and questions to: info@bookahomeinspection.com.

HOUSE TIPS

- Have well water tested for potability and bacteria every 6 months
- Periodically check all basement drains to ensure the trap contains water and refill if needed.
- Avoid any wood contact with the ground regardless of species and protective coatings

Our Readers Asked Us . . .

Q . . . We are in the process of purchasing a property north of the city on acreage. The house is a stone house which has had several additions put on over the years. There is also a large barn on the property. We think the home is more than 100 years old. Because we want to do extensive renovations we need to know if the home and the barn are structurally sound. Can a regular home inspection tell us that?

A . . . A home inspection cannot give you a definitive answer as to the structural stability of any building. However inspectors should be able to detect signs of problem areas within the structure that may lead them to suggest a further evaluation by a qualified structural engineer. Home inspection should be viewed as a first (and cost-effective) step to evaluating a property before a renovation. Stone and timber houses or barns should be inspected by a professional that is familiar with construction practices from a particular era in order to best report the current condition of the buildings. Ask your real estate agent, or check with the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors (OAH) to find a qualified specialist in your area. (www.oahi.com)



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