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Inspection, inspection, inspection

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With the slowdown in property sales, desperate vendors might be tempted to hide faults. Homebuyers need to be savvy - not viewing a property thoroughly could cost £10,000, says **Which?**

A survey* by the consumer organisation reveals that a quarter of people who bought homes in the past five years found faults with their home after moving in. Problems** cost an average of £2,500 to rectify, but one in ten respondents spent more than £10,000 putting things right.

Almost a third of those who'd found faults said they'd missed a problem because it hadn't occurred to them to look. The main issues were poor heating, damp, badly fitting windows and doors and roofing problems. A quarter of them felt that problems had been hidden from them. Common cover-ups include painting over damp, putting furniture in front of cracks or rugs over floor problems, according to a **Which?** property expert.

In addition, while estate agents can't be misleading, they aren't obliged to reveal problems and desperate vendors may be more tempted to hide faults in the current climate. **Which?** recommends asking direct questions and has drawn up a checklist for homebuyers at www.which.co.uk/propertychecklist

The research also surprisingly found that one in 20 house buyers don't view their home at all before buying. It's always a bad idea to buy unseen. Typically people view their home twice before moving in, though **Which?** recommends viewing three or four times.

Which? says it's clear that the current system isn't working properly and it wants to see homebuyers get more information about the condition of a property upfront. It is calling on the government to set up an independent inquiry into the whole house-buying process.

Neil Fowler, Editor, Which?, says:

"Despite falling sales in property, people are still buying homes – and it's likely to be one of the biggest purchases they make. Estate agents can't mislead, but they don't have to reveal problems, so you should always check a prospective property thoroughly."

"When viewing a new home, try not to let your heart rule your head and treat it as a building that needs inspecting. If you do spot faults, don't be put off buying, but at least get a professional opinion, and use this to renegotiate the price - you could save yourself thousands of pounds."

- Ends -

Notes to Editor

*In January 2008, Which? asked 504 members of the public, who had bought a house in the past five years, to complete a survey about their house-buying experiences.

**122 people found a problem after they moved in.