

# THE INSPECTORS' JOURNAL

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*Happy New Year*



## January is National Radon Action Month

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is odorless and tasteless. It is formed from the radioactive decay of uranium. Uranium is found in small amounts in most rocks and soil. It slowly breaks down to other products such as radium, which breaks down to radon.

Radon also undergoes radioactive decay. It divides into two parts-one part is called radiation, and the other part is called a daughter. The daughter, like radon, is not stable, and it also divides into radiation and another daughter. The dividing of daughters continues until a stable, nonradioactive daughter is formed. During the decay process, alpha, beta, and gamma radiation are released. Alpha particles can travel only a short distance and cannot travel through your skin. Beta particles can penetrate through your skin, but they cannot go all the way through your body. Gamma radiation can go all the way through your body.

### How Does Radon Get Into Your Home?

Any home may have a radon problem

Radon is a radioactive gas.

It comes from the natural decay of uranium that is found in nearly all soils. It typically moves up through the ground to the air above and into your home through cracks and other holes in the foundation. Your home traps radon inside, where it can build up. Any home may have a radon problem. This means new and old homes, well-sealed and drafty homes, and homes with or without basements.

Radon from soil gas is the main cause of radon problems. Sometimes radon enters the home through well water (see "[Radon in Water](#)" below). In a small number of homes, the building materials can give off radon, too. However, building materials rarely cause radon problems by themselves.

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## **RADON GETS IN THROUGH:**

1. Cracks in solid floors
2. Construction joints
3. Cracks in walls
4. Gaps in suspended floors
5. Gaps around service pipes
6. Cavities inside walls
7. The water supply



Nearly 1 out of every 15 homes in the U.S. is estimated to have elevated radon levels. Elevated levels of radon gas have been found in many homes in all states. While radon problems may be more common in some areas, any home may have a problem. The only way to know about your home is to test.

### **There are Two General Ways to Test for Radon:**

#### ***SHORT-TERM TESTING:***

The quickest way to test is with short-term tests. Short-term tests remain in your home for two days to 90 days, depending on the device. "Charcoal canisters," "alpha track," "electret ion chamber," "continuous monitors," and "charcoal liquid scintillation" detectors are most commonly used for short-term testing. Because radon levels tend to vary from day to day and season to season, a short-term test is less likely than a long-term test to tell you your year-round average radon level. If you need results quickly, however, dual measurement, continuous monitor or a short-term test followed by a second short-term test may be used to decide whether to fix your home.

#### **Testing should be performed by a professional**

If you a short-term test is being conducted, close your windows and outside doors and keep them closed at least 12 hours prior and during the test. Heating and air-conditioning system fans that re-circulate air may be operated. Do not

operate fans or other machines which bring in air from outside. Fans that are part of a radon-reduction system or small exhaust fans operating only for short periods of time may run during the test. If you are doing a short-term test lasting just 2 or 3 days, be sure to close your windows and outside doors at least 12 hours **before** beginning the test, too. You should not conduct short-term tests lasting just 2 or 3 days during unusually severe storms or periods of unusually high winds. The test kit should be placed in the lowest lived-in level of the home (for example, the basement if it is frequently used, otherwise the first floor). It should be put in a room that is used regularly (like a living room, playroom, den or bedroom) but not your kitchen or bathroom. The kit should be placed at least 20 inches above the floor in a location where it won't be disturbed - away from drafts, high heat, high humidity, and exterior walls.

### ***LONG-TERM TESTING:***

Long-term tests remain in your home for more than 90 days. "Alpha track" and "electret" detectors are commonly used for this type of testing. A long-term test will give you a reading that is more likely to tell you your home's year-round average radon level than a short-term test.

### ***EPA Recommends the Following Testing Steps: Non Real Estate Sale Guidelines***

**Step 1. Take a short-term test. If your result is 4 pCi/L or higher take a follow-up test (Step 2) to be sure.**

**Step 2. Follow up with either a long-term test or a second short-term test:**

- For a better understanding of your year-round average radon level, take a long-term test.
- If you need results quickly, take a second short-term test.

The higher your initial short-term test result, the more certain you can be that you should take a short-term rather than a long-term follow up test. If your first short-term test result is more than EPA's 4 pCi/L, you should take a second short-term test immediately.

**Step 3. If you followed up with a long-term test: Fix your home if your long-term test result is 4 pCi/L or more. If you followed up with a second short-term test: The higher your short-term results, the more certain you can be that you should fix your home.** Consider fixing your home if the average of your first and second test is 4 pCi/L or higher.

Radon can also be a problem in schools and workplaces. Ask your **state radon office** about radon problems in schools, daycare and childcare facilities, and workplaces in your area.

If you are buying or selling a home, you can hire **a qualified tester** to do the testing for you. You should first contact your **state radon office** (CT-DPH) about obtaining a list of qualified professional testers. You can also contact a private radon proficiency program (NEHA or NRSB) for lists of privately certified radon professionals serving your area. For links and information, visit [www.epa.gov/radon/radontest.html](http://www.epa.gov/radon/radontest.html).

The colder months provide the best conditions for testing when you follow the EPA Protocols under "Closed House Conditions"

# Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. At lower levels of exposure, CO causes mild effects that are often mistaken for the flu. These symptoms include headaches, dizziness, disorientation, nausea and fatigue. The effects of CO exposure can vary greatly from person to person depending on age, overall health and the concentration and length of exposure.

## **Sources of Carbon Monoxide**

Unvented kerosene and gas space heaters; leaking chimneys and furnaces; back-drafting from furnaces, gas water heaters, wood stoves, and fireplaces; gas stoves; generators and other gasoline powered equipment; automobile exhaust from attached garages; and tobacco smoke. Incomplete oxidation during combustion in gas ranges and unvented gas or kerosene heaters may cause high concentrations of CO in indoor air. Worn or poorly adjusted and maintained combustion devices (e.g., boilers, furnaces) can be significant sources, or if the flue is improperly sized, blocked, disconnected, or is leaking. Auto, truck, or bus exhaust from attached garages, nearby roads, or parking areas can also be a source.

## **What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?**

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of CO inhalation can cause loss of consciousness and death. Unless suspected, CO poisoning can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms mimic other illnesses. People who are sleeping or intoxicated can die from CO poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms.

## **How does CO poisoning work?**

Red blood cells pick up CO quicker than they pick up oxygen. If there is a lot of CO in the air, the body may replace oxygen in blood with CO. This blocks oxygen from getting into the body, which can damage tissues and result in death.

## **Health Effects Associated with Carbon Monoxide**

At low concentrations, fatigue in healthy people and chest pain in people with heart disease. At higher concentrations, impaired vision and coordination; headaches; dizziness; confusion; nausea. Can cause flu-like symptoms that clear up after leaving home. Fatal at very high concentrations. Acute effects are due to the formation of carboxyhemoglobin in the blood, which inhibits oxygen intake. At moderate concentrations, angina, impaired vision, and reduced brain function may result. At higher concentrations, CO exposure can be fatal.

## **Levels in Homes**

Average levels in homes without gas stoves vary from 0.5 to 5 parts per million (ppm). Levels near properly adjusted gas stoves are often 5 to 15 ppm and those near poorly adjusted stoves may be 30 ppm or higher.

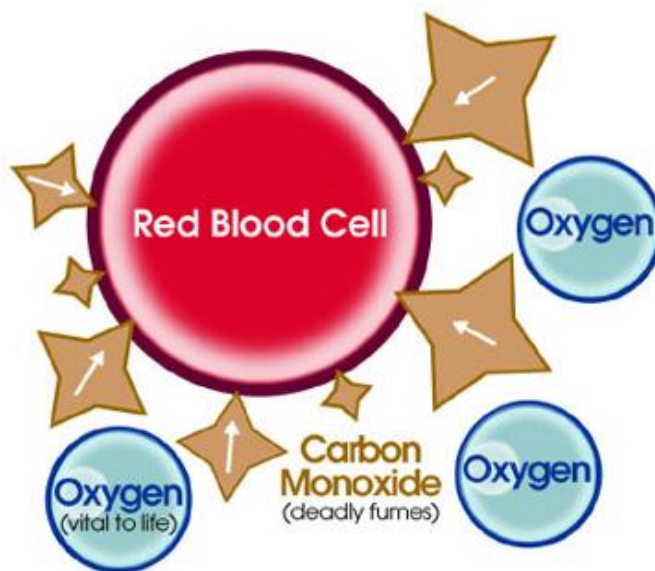
**ALERT: Put generators outside.**

Never use a generator inside homes, garages, crawlspaces, sheds, or similar areas. Deadly levels of carbon monoxide can quickly build up in these areas and can linger for hours, even after the generator has shut off.

## Steps to Reduce Exposure to Carbon Monoxide

It is most important to be sure combustion equipment is maintained and properly adjusted. Vehicular use should be carefully managed adjacent to buildings and in vocational programs. Additional ventilation can be used as a temporary measure when high levels of CO are expected for short periods of time.

- Keep gas appliances properly adjusted.
  - Consider purchasing a vented space heater when replacing an unvented one.
  - Use proper fuel in kerosene space heaters.
  - Install and use an exhaust fan vented to outdoors over gas stoves.
  - Open flues when fireplaces are in use.
  - Choose properly sized wood stoves that are certified to meet EPA emission standards. Make certain that doors on all wood stoves fit tightly.
  - Have a trained professional inspect, clean, and tune-up central heating system (furnaces, flues, and chimneys) annually. Repair any leaks promptly.
  - Do not idle the car inside garage.
- 
- **Measurement Methods**
  - Some relatively high-cost infrared radiation adsorption and electrochemical instruments do exist. Moderately priced real-time measuring devices are also available. A passive monitor is currently under development.
  - **Standards or Guidelines**
  - No standards for CO have been agreed upon for indoor air. The U.S. National Ambient Air Quality Standards for outdoor air are 9 ppm (40,000 micrograms per meter cubed) for 8 hours, and 35 ppm for 1 hour.



**Who is at risk from CO poisoning?**

All people and animals are at risk for CO poisoning. Certain groups — unborn babies, infants, and people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or respiratory problems — are more susceptible to its effects. Each year, more than 400

Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning, more than 20,000 visit the emergency room and more than 4,000 are hospitalized due to CO poisoning. Fatality is highest among Americans 65 and older.

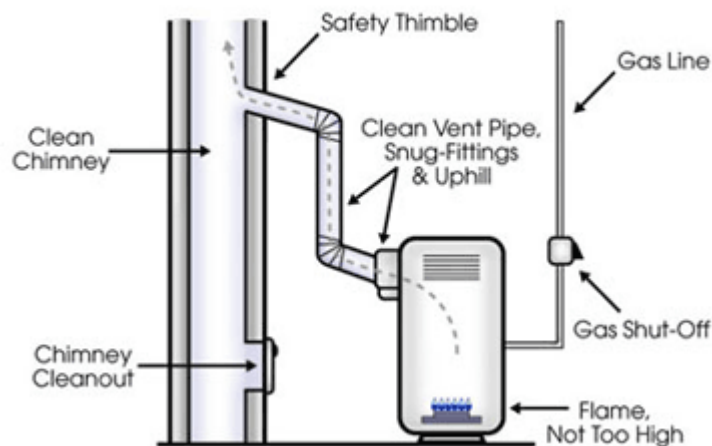
### How can I prevent CO poisoning from my home appliances?

- Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Do not use portable flameless chemical heaters (catalytic) indoors. Although these heaters don't have a flame, they burn gas and can cause CO to build up inside your home, cabin, or camper.
- If you smell an odor from your gas refrigerator's cooling unit have an expert service it. An odor from the cooling unit of your gas refrigerator can mean you have a defect in the cooling unit. It could also be giving off CO.
- When purchasing gas equipment, buy only equipment carrying the seal of a national testing agency, such as the American Gas Association or Underwriters' Laboratories.
- Install a battery-operated CO detector in your home and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.

### How do I vent my gas appliances properly?

- All gas appliances must be vented so that CO will not build up in your home, cabin, or camper.
- Never burn anything in a stove or fireplace that isn't vented.
- Have your chimney checked or cleaned every year. Chimneys can be blocked by debris. This can cause CO to build up inside your home or cabin.
- Never patch a vent pipe with tape, gum, or something else. This kind of patch can make CO build up in your home, cabin, or camper.
- Horizontal vent pipes to fuel appliances should not be perfectly level. Indoor vent pipes should go up slightly as they go toward outdoors. This helps prevent CO or other gases from leaking if the joints or pipes aren't fitted tightly.

#### Here's the Safe Way to Connect Heating Equipment to the Chimney



## How can I heat my house safely or cook when the power is out?

- Never use a gas range or oven for heating. Using a gas range or oven for heating can cause a build up of CO inside your home, cabin, or camper.
- Never use a charcoal grill or a barbecue grill indoors. Using a grill indoors will cause a build up of CO inside your home, cabin, or camper unless you use it inside a vented fireplace.
- Never burn charcoal indoors. Burning charcoal — red, gray, black, or white — gives off CO.
- Never use a portable gas camp stove indoors. Using a gas camp stove indoors can cause CO to build up inside your home, cabin, or camper.
- Never use a generator inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window, door, or vent.

## How can I avoid CO poisoning from my vehicle?

- Have a mechanic check the exhaust system of my car every year. A small leak in your car's exhaust system can lead to a build up of CO inside the car.
- Never run a car or truck in the garage with the garage door shut. CO can build up quickly while your car or truck is running in a closed garage. Never run your car or truck inside a garage that is attached to a house and always open the door to any garage to let in fresh air when running a car or truck inside the garage.
- If you drive a vehicle with a tailgate, when you open the tailgate, you also need to open vents or windows to make sure air is moving through your car. If only the tailgate is open CO from the exhaust will be pulled into the car.

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## CT Licensed Home Inspectors,

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## NEWS from CPSC

### U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Office of Information and Public Affairs

Washington, DC 20207

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 30, 2009

Release # 10-096

**Firm's Recall Hotline: (877) 220-0479**

CPSC Recall Hotline: (800) 638-2772

CPSC Media Contact: (301) 504-7908

## Dehumidifiers Recalled by LG Electronics Tianjin Appliance Due to Fire and Burn Hazards

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in cooperation with the firm named below, today announced a voluntary recall of the following products. Consumers should stop using recalled products immediately unless otherwise instructed.

**Name of Product:** Portable Dehumidifiers

**Units:** About 98,000

**Manufacturer:** LG Electronics Tianjin Appliance Co., of China

**Hazard:** The power connector for the dehumidifier's compressor can short circuit, posing fire and burn hazards to consumers.

**Incidents/Injuries:** LG has received 11 reports of property damage incidents involving arcing, heat, smoke, including four fires that spread to the building structure and involved significant smoke/water damage. No injuries have been reported.

**Description:** This recall involves 30 pint portable dehumidifiers sold under the brand names in the chart below. The dehumidifiers are white with a red shut-off button, controls for fan speed and humidity control and a front-loading water bucket. “Goldstar” or “Comfort-Aire” is printed on the front. The model and serial numbers are printed on the interior of the dehumidifiers and can be viewed after the water bucket is removed.

| Brand        | Model No. | Serial Number Range  | Sold at              |
|--------------|-----------|--|----------------------|
| Goldstar     | GHD30Y7   | 611TAxx00001~08400<br>611TAxx08401~40600<br>612TAxx00001~20400<br>612TAxx21001~30600 | Home Depot           |
| Goldstar     | DH305Y7   | 612TAxx00001~00600<br>701TAxx00001~16800<br>702TAxx00001~03000                       | Wal-Mart             |
| Comfort-Aire | BHD-301-C | 611TAxx00001~01697<br>612TAxx00001~04200<br>701TAxx00001~00578<br>710TAxx00001~00599 | Heat Controller Inc. |
|              |           |  |                      |

**Sold at:** The Home Depot, Walmart and Heat Controller Inc. nationwide from January 2007 through June 2008 for between \$140 and \$150.

**Manufactured in:** China

**Remedy:** Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled dehumidifier, contact LG to determine if it is included in the recall and return it to an authorized LG service center for a free repair.

**Consumer Contact:** For additional information, contact LG toll-free at (877) 220-0479 between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. CT Monday through Friday and between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. CT on Saturday for the location of an authorized LG service center for the repair, or visit the firm’s Web site at [www.30pintdehumidifierrecall.com](http://www.30pintdehumidifierrecall.com)



CPSC is still interested in receiving incident or injury reports that are either directly related to this product recall or involve a different hazard with the same product. Please tell us about it by visiting <https://www.cpsc.gov/cgibin/incident.aspx>

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from thousands of types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. The CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard. The CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters, and household chemicals - contributed significantly to the decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 30 years.

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## NEWS from CPSC

### U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Office of Information and Public Affairs

Washington, DC 20207

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 2009

Release # 10-082

**Firm's Recall Hotline: (800) 553-3199**

CPSC Recall Hotline: (800) 638-2772

CPSC Media Contact: (301) 504-7908

## Home Depot Recalls Dehumidifiers Due to Fire and Burn Hazards

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in cooperation with the firm named below, today announced a voluntary recall of the following consumer product. Consumers should stop using recalled products immediately unless otherwise instructed.

**Name of Product:** Hampton Bay Dehumidifiers

**Units:** About 2,000

**Importer:** The Home Depot, of Atlanta, Ga.

**Hazard:** An internal component can fail causing the dehumidifier to overheat, posing fire and burn hazards to consumers.

**Incidents/Injuries:** Home Depot has received 18 reports of the dehumidifiers catching fire. One consumer reported a burn injury to his forearm.

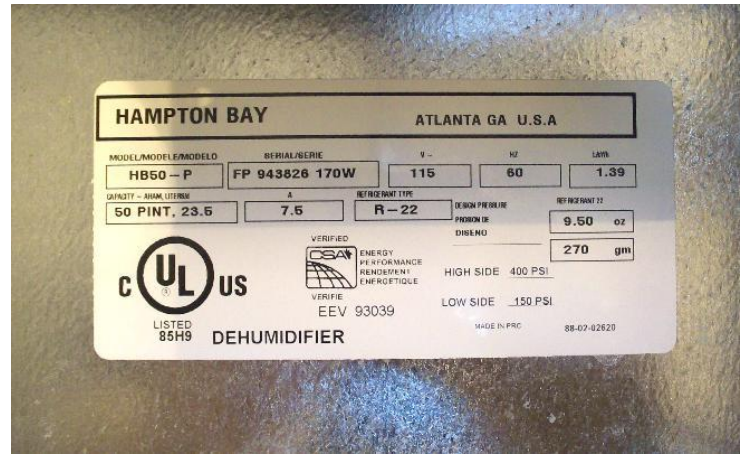
**Description:** The dehumidifiers are beige, have four wheels, and measure 21 inches high, 13 ½ inches wide and 17 ½ inches long. "Hampton Bay" is printed on the front panel. Model HB-50 is being recalled. The model number is printed on the back interior panel.

**Sold at:** The Home Depot from November 2000 through May 2007 for between \$120 and \$150.

**Manufactured in:** China

**Remedy:** Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled dehumidifiers and contact Home Depot to receive a gift card for the full amount of the purchase price.

**Consumer Contact:** For additional information, contact The Home Depot at (800) 553-3199 between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. ET Monday through Friday, or visit the firm's Web site at [www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com)



CPSC is still interested in receiving incident or injury reports that are either directly related to this product recall or involve a different hazard with the same product. Please tell us about it by visiting <https://www.cpsc.gov/cgibin/incident.aspx>

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## Massachusetts Home Inspectors

As you already know, 2010 is a renewal year for Massachusetts Home Inspector Licensing. A required 12 continuing education hours with 1 hour in ethics and 4 hours in 266 CMR is required.

There will be a 4 hour class on 266 CMR on Saturday April 10, 2010 in Worcester. Catalog of classes with registration details will be available in February 2010. Google Worcester Public Schools [Night Life](#) website.

The class focus is on applying the definitions and report writing requirements in the regulations to the systems and components in the Standards of Practice. An hour is anticipated to cover a system in the Standards of Practice. Exterior, Structure, Electrical, and Plumbing will be covered in the class. Time permitting, additional systems will be covered.

At this time I do not know the class size limit. I anticipate a typical classroom will be allocated and guessing 30 seats.

Please let me know if you plan to attend. If there are more than 30, I will work with Worcester Public Schools for a larger room. Cost is \$100.

Best Regards,

Jim Mushinsky

Centsable Inspection - [centsableinspection.web.officelive.com](http://centsableinspection.web.officelive.com)

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## WorkingRE Magazine

December 2009

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[www.workingre.com/workingre/appraisers-not-home-inspectors.html](http://www.workingre.com/workingre/appraisers-not-home-inspectors.html)

### **Appraisers - Inspectors: Line Blurring?**

By David Brauner, Editor

In a recent Working RE story, *Appraiser: I'm No Home Inspector*, appraiser Tony Bamert says he is asked to do work that he is not qualified for- namely that of a home inspector. Several home inspectors say they know how Bamert feels.

With 17 years experience, five as the head of his own firm, Bamert is fully familiar with standard procedures, and feels these requests are pushing him beyond that norm. "As an appraiser, my job is to go through the house, take notes and use comparables to come up with a value for that property," he explains. "That's completely different than the role of a home inspector. Now they are asking the appraiser to test some of the mechanical systems and give a statement if they are in working condition."

Bamert says he's not comfortable with such requests, nor does he have the expertise to make such an evaluation. "On an FHA inspection, our job is not to make a determination on whether something is in good working condition or

not.” he notes. “When something doesn’t look right, we advise to hire a home inspector to take a look.”

Home inspector Chris Temple says he’s been there but did something about it. “We California home inspectors were faced with a very similar circumstance several years ago. When homeowner's insurance companies started getting hit with mold claims, one of their reactions was to have the home inspector complete a one-page questionnaire about the property. The questionnaire did not fall within our home inspector standards of practice, and in fact was way outside of our scope.”

Temple says he and other inspectors put an end to it. “The home inspection community was generally united in rejecting this pass-along liability. Most home inspectors simply refused to do it. I believe the reason we actually got away with not doing it is because of our professional associations (CREIA, ASHI) and a lack of government regulation. The real estate appraisal associations (and insurance providers) need to unite their membership in their opposition.”

Inspector Jon Rudolph has experienced similar “cross over,” when working for lenders. “I have seen a trend in the last six months or so where my (buying) client’s lender and even the mortgage insurance company have asked for my professional opinion on the physical condition of a subject home, stemming from the appraiser’s comments,” said Rudolph.

“I have no problem doing this as it helps my client in the home purchase process,” Rudolph said. “After all, I am in the service business. I obtain permission from my client to respond and discuss the home inspection with the lender or related parties on their behalf. My statements are qualified, limiting my liability with no guarantee or warranty to the home’s condition and they reference the initial inspection report, as the case should be. I understand why these questions are being asked of the inspector. I also think it’s a testament to the value and credibility of the home inspection industry and service today.”

**Here are some questions Rudolph raises:**

\* Fee: "Should inspectors charge clients extra for the time and added liability exposure for these services? If so, what is an appropriate fee?"

\* Unintended Consequences: “So far the requests appear to have been based on the appraiser’s stated observation(s), raising concerns with the underwriter who needs a better understanding of the apparent physical condition and risk- as may affect the loan’s collateral asset,” Rudolph said. “My home inspection observations are more comprehensive; the ‘expert’ opinion. Apparently the underwriter knows the appraiser is not a qualified home inspector. Consequently, each case has come with the risk of opening a new can of worms for the buyer in obtaining the loan or obtaining the loan

with the initial terms, as my observations may reveal bigger and unknown concerns for the underwriter that were not identified by the appraiser.”

\* Possible Conflict of Interest: “My client, the buyer/borrower, has a different objective and perspective than the lender/mortgage insurer,” Rudolph said. “So, a home inspection for a buyer may inadvertently cause problems with the financing because of the more comprehensive assessment of the home’s physical condition and the lender/mortgage insurer are now expanding the physical condition into the lending process. Under some scenarios, I could see a buyer foregoing a home inspection if it would conflict with the loan. If that’s the case, would the lender ‘require’ a home inspection? What if the buyer doesn’t want or approve the disclosure of the home inspection to the lender? What if the buyer, by a chosen option, pays for a home inspection only to have the inspection be the basis for denying the loan or modifying terms that won’t work for the buyer? They could incur some considerable out-of-pocket expenses (home inspection and appraisal) for information benefiting the lender and not them.”

Working RE / OREP  
6760 University Ave., Suite #250  
San Diego, Ca. 92115  
888-347-5273  
www.workingre.com \* www.orep.org

## Web site of the month:

### Ice Dam Article from the University of Minnesota Extension

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/housingandclothing/DK1068.html>

**Editor’s Note:** As we approached our publishing deadline while waiting for permission to re-print this article, here is the link with descriptions and photos all about ice dams. Just cut & paste this link

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