

New Home Walk-Through Pays Off For Buyers

Before you go to settlement on a new home, you and your builder will do a walk through to conduct a final inspection. The walk-through provides an opportunity for you to spot items which may need to be corrected or adjusted, and it allows you to learn about the way your new home works.

Often, a builder will use the walk to educate buyers about the operation of the house's components; the buyer's responsibilities for maintenance and upkeep; warranty coverage and procedures; and the larger community in which the home is located.

When you buy a new appliance or piece of equipment such as a DVD player or washing machine, you usually have to read the instructions before you can understand how to use all of the features. With a new house, you will be receiving a stack of instruction booklets all at once. It helps if someone takes the time to show you how to operate all of the kitchen appliances, the heating and cooling systems, the water heater, the security system and other features in the home. Such an orientation is particularly useful since people often are so busy during a move that they have trouble finding time to carefully read instruction booklets.

Part of your walk-through will be learning about maintenance and upkeep responsibilities. Most new homes come with a one-year warranty on workmanship and materials. However, such warranties do not cover problems that develop because of failure to perform required maintenance. Many builders provide a booklet explaining common upkeep responsibilities of new homeowners and how to perform them.

Should a warranted problem arise after you move in, the builder is likely to have a set of warranty service procedures to follow. Except in emergencies, requests for service should be in writing. This to ensure that everyone clearly understands the service to be performed. The person receiving a service request is not likely to be the person performing the work, and you don't want to rely on word-of-mouth for transmission of your service order.

Many builders schedule two visits during the first year, one near the beginning and the other near the end, to make necessary adjustments and to perform work of a non-emergency nature. You should not expect a builder to rush out immediately for a problem such as a nail pop in your drywall. Such problems occur because of the natural settling of the house and are best addressed in one visit near the end of the first year. If you have moved to a new home from a nearby area, you probably will not spend much time at the walk-through talking about the larger community in which the home is located. However, if you are moving to a new community, a builder can often provide a packet of material to help you become familiar with your new community.

When inspecting the house, an effective way to handle this is with a checklist—called a “punch list.” The list should include everything that needs attention, and you and your builder should agree to a timetable for repairs. Builders prefer to remedy problems before you move in since it is easier for them to work in an empty house. Some items may have to be corrected after move-in. For instance, if your walk-through is in the winter, your builder may have to delay landscaping adjustments until spring.

It is important that you be thorough and observant during the walk-through. Examine all surfaces of counters, fixtures, floors and walls for possible damage carefully. Sometimes disputes arise because a buyer may discover a gouge in a counter top after move-in, and there is no way to prove whether it was caused by the builder's workers or the buyer's movers. Many builders ask their buyers to sign a form at the walk-through stating that all surfaces have been inspected and that there were no damage other than what has been noted on the walk-through checklist.

Ask a lot of questions during the walk-through and take notes on the answers. Never be afraid to appear stupid by asking too many questions. That is how you learn. It is important to view the walk-through as a positive learning experience which will enhance your enjoyment of your home.