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Vancouver Condo: 101

October 25, 2012 Vancouver Home Inspector No Comments [Articles, Blog, Building Envelope, Healthy Homes](#)



As most people living in the Lower Mainland now know, buying a condominium can be, to put it mildly, "problematic". In addition to all the normal considerations taken into account when buying real estate, condos (and some houses) require extra care and attention due to our infamous "leaky condo" problems. The services of an experienced [Home Inspector](#), who's familiar with construction practices in this region, is your best resource in identifying problem buildings. But before you make an offer to purchase you can prepare yourself with an understanding of the condo basics.

What does "leaky condo" really mean?

It is a structure in which water has penetrated the outer cladding and become trapped within the building walls, or "envelope", to such an extent that wood rot, and corrosion have caused significant damage to the walls and structural components as well as, in some cases, to the interior of the individual units. The moisture damage if severe and left unattended will eventually affect the structural integrity of the building and the health of the occupants. Time is a critical factor; the sooner repairs are made the less extensive and expensive they will be.

What is rainscreening?

Rainscreening means that an air space or drainage cavity exists behind the siding. This allows any water that has gotten past the siding to drain out quickly through the cavity and exit to the exterior, usually at every floor level. If a building is rainscreened the possibility of significant failure is unlikely. The exception to this rule is concrete exteriors; concrete is the only material that performs well in a non-rainscreened wall. Types of exteriors from the most to the least problematic are: synthetic stucco (EIFS), traditional stucco, wood, vinyl, traditional brick, concrete

What should condo buyers look for?

First, consider the age of the building. The majority of problem buildings were constructed between 1980 and 1999. In 1999 the building code was changed to address this problem and *all* new buildings were required to be rainscreened. To date about 50% of Greater Vancouver condos built during this period have been rainscreened. Houses built during this period are also at risk with many showing signs of envelope failure.

What else can buyers do to protect themselves when buying a condo?

Obtain all available documents concerning the building: Strata Minutes, Engineers reports, Warranty reports. Read the Strata Minutes looking for mention of systemic problems such as leaks, moisture, or mold. Note these so that they can be analyzed to determine if the source is exterior or interior in origin. Exterior sources, particularly if there are many, could indicate building envelope problems. Make any Engineering and Warranty reports available to the home inspector, preferably while on-site. Your inspector will combine his/her own observations with information you have highlighted in the Strata Minutes and from the inspector's summary of the Engineering report to make an informed assessment of the building envelope condition. The more information available, the more accurate the assessment will be.

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The decision to buy a particular a home is often an emotional one and based on a whole variety of factors. A professional home inspection will not only give you an objective opinion on the building condition, but also a little time in a high-pressure process to pause and consider your choices, giving you the peace of mind to confidently make the best decision for your circumstances and needs.

Our [Vancouver home inspectors](#) are familiar with construction practices & can identify leaky condo issues before you buy. [Contact us](#) today to book an appointment for a [condo inspection in Vancouver](#) or throughout the Lower Mainland.

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