

# The NC-ASHI<sup>®</sup> Home Inspector

NORTH CAROLINA CHAPTER OF THE  
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HOME INSPECTORS

August/September 2008

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## UPCOMING TRAINING by John Guy

**Our August 20<sup>th</sup> meeting will be in Asheboro at the Holiday Inn Express. Our goal is to make the meeting more accessible to our far-traveling colleagues.** We will take a break from our usual educational speaker. Our speaker will be Dr. Larry Hungerford with Woodard and Company, Advance, NC. "Dr. H." is a former college professor and is a Chartered Mutual Fund Counselor specializing in no-load mutual funds. He has given seminars on mutual fund investing since 1986. He will speak on investing and planning for retirement. Whether you are just getting started or nearing retirement, this promises to be a most informative meeting you will not want to miss!

Our September 17<sup>th</sup> meeting (location TBA) will be on inspecting garage doors. A representative of the International Door Assn. will be flying in from San Antonio, TX to present. Please make a special effort to attend.

Our major Educational Fall Conference featuring Douglas Hansen and Peter Drenan of Code Check is scheduled for October 17-19 at the Clarion Hotel in Greensboro. This is the one to earn all your required CE hours for licensure. Please mark your calendars.

The Peer Review exercise will be offered on Thursday, Oct. 16th. You may be a candidate for Inspector by Review® if you have done 100 inspections. Another way to participate is to tour the review house with a teaching inspector on Thursday afternoon. Contact Andy Hilton (336) 961-6809 about openings and costs.

Welcome to our visitors at recent meetings: **Robin Mudd**, Walnut Cove and **John Mettle**, Kernersville.

Among our newest Chapter Members we welcome **John Cauthen** with First Call Home Inspections, Chapel Hill. **Rob Leavell** is starting a new inspection business in Fuquay-Varina. **Mike Hungar** operates National Property Inspections from Union Cross.

Suggestions on meeting and conference topics are always welcome at [john@guyhi.com](mailto:john@guyhi.com) or 336-889-4897.

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## RADON MITIGATION TRAINING

The Southern Regional Radon Training Center (SRRTC) will be offering Radon Mitigation Training and the Mitigation Certification Exam in October in Greensboro. Exact date and place TBD. Check the SRRTC's website for updates ([www.bece.auburn.edu/srrtc/](http://www.bece.auburn.edu/srrtc/)).

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## CARBON MONOXIDE TRAINING, AUGUST 12-14, 2008, RALEIGH

Introduction to general CO & flue draft testing. How to offer CO-related services, troubleshooting CO problems and proper CO reporting. Teacher is Jim Davis. Cost: \$195. Seminar continues for two more days for those in HVAC industry; concentration is on diagnosis and repairs with certification (\$395). Register at [www.nationalcomfortinstitute.com](http://www.nationalcomfortinstitute.com)

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER by Marion Peeples

I hope you haven't noticed, but business for some inspectors has been a little spotty the last few months. Cyclical slowdowns in the market are standard fare in any real estate-related business. Admittedly the mortgage market problems and the rapid run up in the price of oil have taken a larger than usual toll on the market.

Times like these should give you the time and motivation to re-think how you go about your business. There is no bad time or good time to figure out how to set your prices and plan for the future. This is something you should keep an eye on 24/7/365, regardless of the economic conditions.

Having your pricing structure situated properly in the market will maximize earning potential in good times and prevent bleeding in the bad times.

You should make a list of all your costs of doing business and update it at least yearly. Look back at last year's tax return and list all those things you told Uncle Sam you spent to keep the business running. Phones, fuel, health insurance, E&O insurance, general liability insurance, car insurance, homeowners insurance for your office, equipment, supplies, education and such are obvious additions to the list. Make sure you fully account for the cost of owning and operating your inspection vehicle for a year. Not just what it cost to buy, but make a line item on your list for money to be set aside for a new vehicle.

We are independent contractors by and large with no corporate back up plan for disability and home inspectors are a pretty gray haired lot. Look into quality long-term disability insurance with an option to convert it to long-term care insurance if it becomes needed. The cost is usually about one inspection per month and can cover your basic living expenses in a worst-case scenario. If you have enough money to live out your life without an income, you probably have no business crawling through nasty crawl spaces. Add the disability insurance to the list.

Life insurance needs vary too widely for me make any assumptions, but if you have folks depending on you add that to your new list as well.

Plan for vacations and add their cost to your list.

Here comes the part that trips up most home inspectors, or most any one man shop offering a service to the public: Pay yourself first and plan for retirement. Add to your cost of business list what you would have to pay someone else to do what you do. Your salary is a cost of doing business, not just what you keep after everyone else has been paid. IRA's and Simplified Employee Plan (SEP) IRA's are easy to set up and can shield up to one quarter of your annual adjusted gross income from taxation. Add a number equal to one quarter of last year's AGI to the list to give a good round number for retirement planning. If you don't cover those aspects of pricing you may never do more than run in place and barely keep your head above water.

Add all the costs of doing business you can think of and divide that number by the number of inspections you realistically anticipate performing in the coming year. The resulting basic cost per inspection is what it costs you to walk out the front door of your home each workday.

If you are diligent about getting all the cost numbers right, the final figure may be sobering. It was for me the first time I sat down and went through this exercise several years ago. You may find you are losing money and didn't even know it. I discovered that it cost me more to perform one inspection than many of my competitors' total inspection fee.

Get a good grip on the real costs of being a home inspector and plan for when you no longer want to work or are unable to work.

Marion Peeples, Non-certified financial planner

Until October...

We are always looking for handy, unique tool ideas and war stories to include in the newsletter! E-mail them anytime to John Woodmansee at [jjwoodmansee@bellsouth.net](mailto:jjwoodmansee@bellsouth.net)

## NC HOME INSPECTOR LICENSURE BD. and LEGISLATIVE NEWS

NCHILB Director Don Warner reports that Theodore (Ted) Triebel (Captain, US Navy, ret.), Orange County, is House Speaker Joe Hackney's choice to fill the Board seat vacated this spring by Harry Todd. The General Assembly just approved Triebel's appointment for a four year term to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 (H.B. 2788). The Governor has yet to take action on Jim Liles' expired position on the Board.

The General Assembly also approved the addition of Home Inspectors to the list of professionals required to obtain a State Privilege License. NC-ASHI sponsored this bill to prevent inspectors from being taxed by multiple local entities (H.B. 2558). The annual license will be retroactive to July 1, 2008, and we have until Oct. 1, 2008 to apply and be licensed (\$50, payable to the NC Dept. of Revenue. Call 877-308-9103 for the form).

The licensing fees (\$150 or \$100) for our annual license renewal with the NCHILB has been suspended for the 12 month period beginning October 1, 2008.

Sen. David Hoyle's bill (S.B. 1143), the infamous one that would have made us criminals for mentioning safety issues in our Summary, got re-written at a cost of \$6000 to our Chapter. As re-written it enables the NCHILB to re-design the criteria for getting a Home Inspector's license. Alas, the bill is stuck in a House Committee and may die there.

An important judicial ruling by the NC Court of Appeals supports the claim of a home inspector that he may, by contract with the client, limit his exposure to liability by negligence to one year (vs. the three year standard for negligence claims). You should keep this precedent in mind when renewing your E & O insurance and be sure that your contract contains the right wording.

## GETTING TOUGH WITH NON-PAYING CLIENTS

Are you having problems collecting fees from clients? One way is to get the client's credit card data upfront as collateral for your service and put a hold on the amount owed. This means that the money is being held in reserve for you if you need to exercise this payment option. Be sure that the Selling agent, if there is one, has a copy of your bill to present at closing, and send billings out every month to remind folks that you are expecting payment. But when all else fails, there is help through legal means. Here's a comparison of filing a Mechanics' Lien versus taking someone to Small Claims Court. The lien becomes a claim of record upon the property and becomes a problem if the property's ownership is to change. If you win in a Small Claim action, the Court becomes your partner in collecting a debt. The rules are the same throughout North Carolina. Neither action requires an attorney.

	<b>Mechanics' Lien:</b>	<b>Small Claims:</b>
Filing Fee:	\$6 for the 1 <sup>st</sup> page, \$0.25 for each additional page	\$76 plus \$15 per defendant to be served
Forms:	No official form, but plenty of examples on internet	Official paperwork to fill out at courthouse
Limit on \$ owed:	None, but must be filed within 180 days of work done	\$5000
Where to file:	County Courthouse	County Courthouse

## PRODUCT & DESIGN FAILURES

Compiled by Andy Hilton & John Woodmansee

***Knowing about the building components that have a history of premature or unexpected failure makes you a sharper inspector. Sometimes it's not a particular product that fails, but the way the product is used which causes problems (design failures). Included are safety recalls that come via the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), plus the recalls that manufacturers generate.***

## ROOF & EXTERIOR COMPONENTS

(1) Fiberglass roofing shingles which lack sufficient tensile strength to stretch when the roofing gets cold and the shingles contract. The shingles split in vertical lines or in other directions, esp. at the tab cuts. In this area **Genstar** brand roofing has been especially troubled, but this "thermal stress" problem occurs in some others. This problem is aging-out as these failed shingles are being discovered and/or replaced. The problem typically shows in 6-8 years of shingle life.

(2) Those plastic, moulding pieces used to trim window panels in exterior, steel doors.

(3) Hardboard siding...bad-mouthed for decades and still much used. Probably no more a failed product than other wood sidings, but so often poorly installed that it gets bad marks. What causes most trouble? Over-nailing, using the wrong nail, embedding it behind decks and stoops so that it stays wet, poor paint preparation of its edges where its laminated structure gets wet and expands, installation too close to the roofing on rake sides of dormers, and exposure where rain water splashes on it.

(4) Homes built without the protection of eaves or soffits. Think about those contemporary style homes with their spare, clean lines and lots of trim, siding, doors and windows exposed to the weather...often more troubled by retaining the "natural wood" look and leaving the wood exposed to rain and the sun.

(5) Front entry doors facing into the sun behind a storm door... great as a solar panel, hard on the wood door. These doors get tortured by the sun's drying effect and the heat. If the door is metal it may burn a child.

(6) Flimsy metal garage doors: An opener attached to the top panel of a poorly made door will bend and distort the top section. This happens when any obstruction or binding at the tracks makes the door stick or stop. Even the inspector's holding the door will damage it...even barely restraining the door. How about the following comment in your report?

The garage door opener, when properly adjusted and working, should stop the door when it meets reasonable resistance... opening or closing. This is an important safety protection feature on all garage door openers. This door could not be tested because its metal frame appears to lack the strength to withstand such a test without permanent distortion and damage to the door itself. *We recommend that :*

1. The door's top panel must be reinforced so that it will not distort. Keep in mind that this door eventually may suffer damage unless the opener happens to be correctly adjusted.
2. After rebuilding the door, have the opener's sensitivity adjusted and properly tested.

(7) In the garage the light sensor devices at the car door can be installed too high to detect the pet cat running to escape from the garage. What if the control button for the opener is so low that kids can reach it? Not safe.

## MOISTURE CONTROL

(1) Building an earth-filled stoop against the wood-framed house without moisture and termite protection for the band joist.

(2) Downspouts that terminate with an elbow at the foundation wall and discharge roof water that ponds next to the house.

(3) Synthetic stucco or EIFS cladding used where water can get under it at joints (esp. window sill and door threshold corners), roof-to-wall drainage kick-out areas, etc. and saturate the wood framing in the wall, leaving the wood to rot because drying potential is poor.

(4) Certain species of wood, esp. when finger-jointed, which don't weather well and don't get properly sealed against water penetration. Wood window sills, side jambs and trim on doors and windows are first to deteriorate.

## INTERIORS & APPLIANCES

(1) There should be an 18" clearance between the range top and whatever is combustible above it. And a range hood must have a way for the blower's air to escape, and the installer must arrange for that before hanging the hood otherwise the air will discharge nowhere!

(2) Vinyl or metal replacement style windows whose counter-balance devices fail. These sashes are heavy. Best to test each window to assure that the sashes stay put when opened to a certain place in their track.

(3) The industry standard since 1991 is that all new free-standing, kitchen ranges are to have a device that prevents the range from tipping forward. The CPSC reports 84 injuries and 33 deaths between 1980 and 2006 caused by tipping ranges. Sears Roebuck just settled a lawsuit for negligence because their people were not installing the anti-tip device. A study found that only 5% of newer ranges have these, and that sounds about right.

(4) GE (also Eterna, Hotpoint, Sears-Kenmore) dishwashers sold between 9/1997 & 12/2001 recalled for fire hazard in door wiring from leakage of washing chemicals. Go to the website for the table of models affected ([www.geappliances.com](http://www.geappliances.com)).

(5) Older GE-Hotpoint dishwashers with a slider type switch for the "heated dry/energy saver" function. These switches arced and could create a fire. This was a 1999 recall on washers made between 4/1983 & 10/1989 ([www.geappliances.com/plcy/rcll.htm](http://www.geappliances.com/plcy/rcll.htm)).

(6) Whirlpool's recall of their over-the-range microwave-hood combination with the serial # "XC". Kenmore and Kitchenaid brands are included, too. The units that have been checked for a potential fire hazard have a 1/2" round, green button sticker on their door opening (sold Jan 1998-September 2001; [www.repair.whirlpool.com](http://www.repair.whirlpool.com)).

(7) Insulated glass window and door panels poorly made so they fail at their edge seals and "fog" as they allow air to enter the previously desiccated space between the panes. Wenco (Jenn-Weld Corp.) and some Huttig (Huttig Sash and Door) windows are among the losers in North Carolina. MW (MW Corp., Rocky Mount, VA) brand windows do uniformly well in the builder window category. Problems most often occur in big panels, ones moved a lot (like door panels), and ones which catch the sun (southern & western) exposure

## ELECTRICAL

(1) Ground fault circuit interrupter devices, especially the wall plug variety. Failure rate is high after about 6 years; breakers do better.

(2) Aluminum wire when nicked (it's brittle) or coupled to other wires or connection devices like lugs, screws, wire nuts in such a way that the aluminum wire can work loose, create its insulating oxide, and overheat at junctions.

(3) Square D arc fault circuit breakers with blue buttons made between 3/1/2004 and 9/23/2004. The dates are hidden under the breaker, so an electrician should confirm the dates. These still work on overcurrent protection but their arc detection capability is compromised (Nov. 2004; [www.us.squared.com/recallafci](http://www.us.squared.com/recallafci)).

(4) Counterfeit circuit breakers labeled as "Square D" which can fail to trip when overloaded. Go to the website for data (6/5/2008; [www.ebulb.net](http://www.ebulb.net)).

(5) Federal-Pacific Stab-Lok panels and breakers: Poor design of the "stab-lok" feature with potential for arcing and poorly made breakers that may fail to trip under load. Douglas Hansen who authors some of the Code Check manuals believes that Federal-Pacific equipment should be replaced, not repaired.

(6) Some older, exterior, electrical main panels (Zinsco?) supplied by Duke Power can be short-circuited (injuring/killing the inspector) while removing of the dead front cover.

(7) Screw-in plug fuses are innocent enough, and do their job properly. But people replace them with oversized fuses. Unless an electrician installs a non-tamper "S" base, the sin of under-protection persists. Under-protection at fuses or breakers is also common for AC and heat pump units, esp. when they get replaced with more energy efficient units with lower amperage protection.

## PLUMBING

(1) Delta faucets with their swiveling ball design...they leak under the handle.

(2) The original acetate fittings used in early installations of polybutylene water piping. There was also trouble with the compressed, squeeze ring attachment procedure for this piping. Polybutylene piping itself has been failing in water containing high chlorine levels or when used in hydronic heating systems like the State Apollo system where HOT water stays in the piping for long periods.

(3) Dishwasher drain hoses are to have protection from siphoning dirty water back into the washer. This could be a vacuum breaker on the sink (rarely seen), or a loop in the drain hose, high as possible in the base cabinet before discharge into the sink drain. Some dishwashers have this drain loop incorporated into the washer's side under the insulation.

(4) Older brass, flexible, gas connector pipes: prone to split open with disastrous results.

(5) Corrugated Stainless Steel Tubing (CSST) has been found to be susceptible to damage from arcing by direct or nearby lightning strikes. A lightning strike can create holes and/or cracks in the CSST, allowing gas leaks that can result in a fire and or explosion. Latest NEC ruling is that this piping be bonded to the electrical service equipment, i.e. a bonding conductor all the way back to the grounding buss

TO BE CONTINUED...

This is only part of the greater list. Problems in the following categories will be listed in the October/November Newsletter:

Heating & Cooling  
Attics, Crawl Spaces & Basements  
Structural Matters  
Environmental Matters

We see this list as constantly expanding. New problems arise in time. Most importantly, we inspectors bring our own insights, and these need to be shared among us.

GOT OTHERS YOU THINK NEED TO BE INCLUDED? SEND THEM ALONG TO JOHN WOODMANSEE ([jjwoodmansee@bellsouth.net](mailto:jjwoodmansee@bellsouth.net)) or Andy Hilton ([hiltonhome@yadtel.net](mailto:hiltonhome@yadtel.net)) OR BRING THEM TO THE NEXT NCASHI MEETING AND WE WILL GET THEM INSERTED INTO OCTOBER'S NEWSLETTER.

## REALTORS® and Home Inspectors Work Together

Viewpoint by John Woodmansee

Bill Dillon has been bragging about the workings and achievements within the joint REALTOR®/ Home Inspector Committee of the Winston-Salem Regional Assn. of REALTORS® (WSRAR). Bill and REALTOR® Brad Hunter are the Co-Chairmen. This is the first successful group within the structure of a REALTOR® organization in NC, and they have managed to survive seven years when others have failed. I think the credit for this marriage success must go to our ASHI® leaders like Bill, Bruce Rudd, and Andy Hilton, who with REALTORS® John Cosgrove, Julie Poplin, Paul McGill and the committee members who have been loyal to this sometimes difficult venture. Bravo to you all! Here is why this group is so unusual.

You understand that REALTORS® get anxious and sometimes angry about us inspectors. We all know that they (well at least a few vocal ones) want to manage our affairs, standardize our reports, keep us from mentioning troubling things like safety concerns in our Summaries, and in general get us to respect the job that they do. What better a place to get all the dirty laundry out than in their house? And that is what happens. We talk about report language and how to deal with defect issues.

The Committee sponsored a Lunch & Learn workshop in June that was a huge success. Radon testing, septic, UST, and termite problems got discussed. The REALTORS® had a chance to confront the inspectors, and it was a lively meeting...so successful that it gets continued on September 18<sup>th</sup>. We are all winners in this kind of effort.

In the recent Committee meetings there has begun an excellent, continuing exercise. They consider various comments from a mock inspection report, e.g. *"The front is broken off a bathroom vanity drawer. The drawer should be repaired"*. The group is asked: *"Is this a legitimate defect? Can it be negotiated under the contract?"* Home inspectors have a different way of looking at this defect than do real estate folks, and the discussion makes this obvious.

This group is getting more at home in the WSRAR. The group has a hand in the orientation classes for new members, and someone from the Committee writes a news article each month for their newsletter. The group is promoting a CE credit course for REALTORS® on understanding home inspections. Bruce Rudd is the author of the training manual for this new course, and he will teach the course.

Perhaps the best benefit of this Committee is that it is a forum where people can speak about their concerns. We talk about the touchy issues and have members who get political and confrontative about things. Better here than through legislators and lobbyists in Raleigh! Two of our members, George Bell and Marion Peeples are on that ill-fated ad-hoc committee of the NCHILB that has been charged with what to do with the Summary Report debacle. The Committee is much interested in what the NCHILB is doing, and we are kept informed.

Bill Dillon and WSRAR President Julie Poplin are in a missionary frame of mind these days having encouraged the High Point group about having a joint committee (again). Bill wants us Home Inspectors to get behind this effort and offers his help. You can attend one of the meetings: every third Tuesday at 1 pm in the WSRAR office building, 195 Executive Park Blvd., Winston-Salem (maybe not September because of the Lunch & Learn on 9/18).

Thanks to Bill Dillon for his input on this story. He operates from Tobaccoville: ([dilloninspections@altel.net](mailto:dilloninspections@altel.net) or phone 336-924-6002).

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**Gone to...**  
By Andy Hilton

A little story to remind us all of how important is to remember it's the little things that could possibly make the difference in a really good day and REALLY bad day.

In the spring of 2006 I inspected a home in the historic area of Winston-Salem. This home was a typical single-family one-story home

with a cellar/crawl space type foundation that was built in the early 20's. The home had been added onto twice and remodeled countless times. My client lived out of town and had not planned to be attending our inspection, as is typical of out-of-towners. The Realtor® had also planned to skip out on the festivities of the day as the home was vacant and she had seen her share of "old" house inspections. Upon arrival I made my usual observations assessing the home's exterior as I approached the front porch. The first thing that caught my eye was the massive oak tree in the front yard. The tree was well over one-hundred years old. Mind you I did not count growth rings but you get the idea... this tree was HUGE.

I entered the home, and made a quick tour to confirm water, gas and electricity was "on". This was starting to look really good as all utilities were on, and I had the place all to myself.

I began my inspection at the exterior, proceeded to the roof, and things went well finding some of the typical defects associated with any eighty plus year old home. I re-entered the home with my step-ladder in hand, started the dishwasher, and proceeded to the attic scuttle access (what fun those are). As I entered the attic and up-righted myself I thought "not too bad", there was some plank flooring to walk on and I did not have to navigate the area on my hands and knees (again "not too bad").

One of the additions was at the front of the original structure and the other at the rear. The only access to the additions of the attics was to wiggle my now sweat-covered body through the old gable vents that had been removed for access to these areas. So I did, and when I entered the front attic there was a great view of the HUGE old oak tree through the front gable wall window looming over the front of the structure. I paused for a moment and thought of the tree and what it had seen and experienced over its lifetime. Standing proud and providing the wonderful shade to the front yard of this home. If any of you have children you may know of a children's book titled the "Spooky Old Tree" featuring the Berenstain Bears. My son had my wife or I read it for a bedtime story at least three times a week as a toddler. The story of the spooky old tree was the first thing that came to mind as stared at the tree. O.K enough daydreaming, and it was back to work. Tracing my steps rearward I climbed back through the old gable vent opening into the original attic only to find another old gable vent opening to access the rear attic cavity. Boy, this is getting fun now. So I made my way in...completing the rear attic inspection. While finishing up in the attic I could hear the wind picking up outdoors and few rumblings of thunder off in the distance. I thought to myself, "probably going to be getting wet this afternoon".

I made my way back to civilization (out of the attic) and finished up the inside of the home and the cellar and crawl space, completing my inspection. I gathered up all my equipment, started out the front door and noticed there indeed was an early afternoon thunderstorm brewing and there was that "spooky old tree" again just staring back at me as passed it and loaded my belongings and left for my afternoon appointment, and sure enough I did get wet.

When I arrived home that afternoon I told my wife of the old house I had inspected earlier in the day. I talked about the "Spooky Old Tree" book, the impending thunderstorm and we reminisced together again about the tree and the book. The next morning I awoke to my same routine, walk the dog, pick my morning paper and read the front page while my dog searches for that "perfect" spot to do...well, you know. I opened up the paper and to my surprise there was the home I had inspected the day before right there on the front page of my local paper. It did look somewhat different, though. That "Spooky Old Tree" had been toppled by the storm and preceded to remodel that house again. Only this time the house was now in TWO pieces. The tree had landed directly on the front gable wall at the perfect angle on the ridge board of the roof and split the house in two. I thought to myself this is truly amazing. Less than twenty four hours earlier I had been in that house, that attic, wiggling through old gable vents, walking the planks and it NEVER occurred to me that I could have been amid the rubble had that been an afternoon appointment.

So here's the rub in the little things that could make or break your day. I now have two calendars--one with me in the field (Palm handheld) and one back at the office (desk top computer). Both are synchronized and have the same information about who, what, where, and when regarding my daily activities. The hope is...if my luck is not as good the next time, at least they'll know where to look for my body.

Andy Hilton operates Hilton Home Inspections from Yadkinville, NC

## YOU'RE CRAZY TO GO THROUGH THAT!

Editorial Comments by John Woodmansee

That's what my family tells me when I describe our Chapter's Peer Review exercise. About 40% of our Chapter colleagues have stepped-up to the challenge of finding every "must find" defect that a group of talented home inspectors have agreed by consensus are to be found in a specific review house. This sounds reasonable and, yes, possible, even with just two hours to inspect the house by yourself. So lots of us have tried to win the prize, but none of us have found 100% of those "must finds". I don't know how well others have fared, but the last time I tried (three times now), I did what I thought was a zinger inspection and got 41% of the "must finds"! Each try results in failure. I come out of each experience with a renewed sharpness about the things I miss, and that helps me when I do the real thing for pay. That's the good part. But I admit that the repeated failures wear on me. That is the bad part.

I used to say to myself: "Just give me the time, and I will find every problem". But that assertion of confidence assumes that (1) I know what to look for, and (2) my inspector skills are a professionally-honed part of me and only improve with time. The Peer Review experience is a humbling test that shows how flawed these assumptions are.

The basic design is good: a review of my performance by a panel of my peers. This is not just passing a school test or claiming experience that correlates to home inspections. It is me showing my colleagues, all of whom are first rate inspectors, how well I do my stuff. That's the best of professional credentialing. Ph.D. candidates defend their dissertation work to a panel of peers as a final step to obtaining their degree. Most professional golfers attain their invitation to play in the national tours by going through the grueling Qualification or "Q" School in which they play for the lowest scores against other hopefuls. That is a form of peer review.

The Peer Review is an established routine and its protocol is licensed to us by the ASHI®-Great Lakes Chapter. Changing the passing criteria does not make much sense to this "Three-Timer". But it's time to re-think the typical outcome and how it can be more of a winning experience instead of a flat-out defeat for the home inspector candidate. Sometimes I brag to my clients or REALTORS® that my work has been peer-reviewed because that willingness to be critiqued signals a very professional attitude. In the military they give you time-in-service chevrons and medals that you can wear on your uniform to show what you have been through. Why not give all Peer Review Candidates public recognition and maybe a pin for "Professional Review" and encouragement to brag?

I want to know more about NC-ASHI®!

I am a Certified ASHI® Member       NC-ASHI® renewal

I am an ASHI® Associate       Add me to your mailing list

I am not an ASHI® Assoc. or Member, but want to join NC-ASHI®

Information on the next Peer Review session

Dues are free for first-time members. Renewals are \$100 annually, but remember they are considered paid for the next year when you join us at our Fall 2008 Educational Conference.

Send this and your personal information to:

NC-ASHI® Secretary Andy Hilton  
Hilton Home Inspection, Inc.  
3033 Lori Lane  
Yadkinville, NC 27055

## GRANITE COUNTERTOPS: A SERIOUS RADON SOURCE?

By Brenda Jo Breining

A July 24, 2008 article in the New York *Times* quotes an EPA source saying, "We've been hearing from people all over the country concerned about high readings." The concern is about radon gas being produced by granite countertops. The article mentions one home where a basement radon level was 6 pCi/L while the kitchen with its granite countertops had a level of 100 pCi/L.

At the end of July the EPA released statements concerning this issue. Neither imported nor domestic granite used for countertops has to be tested for radiation levels before being installed. They are continuing to monitor and analyze research presented on this issue.

The Marble Institute of America has said claims made about granite emitting dangerous levels of radon and radiation are "ludicrous," but they are working with the independent scientific community to set standards to test granite for radon.

A study done at the University of Akron's Department of Geology and Environmental Science (Chyi, LL, 2008.) tested 13 granite types in airtight containers. When adapting the recommended EPA action level of 4pCi/L as a reference and the house is not in active use, one sample raises the radon level less than 0.3 pCi/L. Two samples added only approximately 0.04 pCi/L. All of the other countertops added an insignificant amount of radon to the house. If normal air exchange rate is applied or the house is actively used, then the radon addition from all 13 types of granite should be much smaller than the levels obtained in the study.

So how does that affect home inspectors and radon measurement professionals? Since we are seen as the radon measurement experts, I'm expecting to get some anxious inquiries from homeowners with these popular countertops. It will come down to this: "Tell me my home is safe."

So what do we do when testing a home with granite countertops? In addition to officially testing in the home on the lowest level with potential living space, should we do a peace-of-mind test on the kitchen counter even though the EPA tells us to stay out of kitchens and bathrooms when testing for radon? Should home inspectors test granite countertops for radiation emitted from granite countertops?

Catherine Rosfjord, Radon Coordinator for western NC suggests we continue testing the air in the home, as this is the main health concern continuing to avoid testing in the kitchen due to heat and humidity issues. If the homebuyer is very concerned about the radon level in the kitchen and is willing not to use the stove or oven over the test period, then an accurate reading could be obtained close to the countertops.

Brenda Jo Breining is the owner of Piedmont Radon Testing and is the Office Manager for The Home Inspector Co.

Thank goodness for those church newsletters. Here are two excerpts.

*The Low Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7pm.  
Please use the back door.*

*The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.*

**North Carolina ASHI®**  
**GREAT INSPECTORS; THE BEST OF COLLEAGUES**

## **North Carolina Chapter, American Society of Home Inspectors**

Marion Peeples, President

We meet on the third Wednesday of most months. **August's meeting is at the Holiday Inn Express in Asheboro at 3PM.** Plan to join us and stay for casual dinner after the meeting. Visitors are always welcome. Visit our website: [www.ncashi.com](http://www.ncashi.com).

Directions to Holiday Inn Express Asheboro: From US 220 Take US 64E. Hotel is 2 miles on left. From west, take US 64E. Hotel is 2 Miles on left past US 220. From east, take US 64W. Hotel is 1 traffic light past NC 42.

August--Savings and Retirement Issues for the Self-Employed (Dr. Larry Hungerford)  
September--Garage Doors, Location TBA

### **FALL CONFERENCE**

We will host Douglas Hansen and Peter Drenan of the popular Code Check guides. October 17-19 in Greensboro. Save the date! Topics will be: Building Exteriors, Mechanicals, Safety Glazing, and A History of Electricity.

Newsletter of the NC Chapter of the  
American Society of Home Inspectors  
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Winston-Salem, NC 27106

Address Correction Requested

Your **NC-ASHI HOME INSPECTOR** Newsletter  
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