

## **How important are building permits?**

Prudent buyers complete thorough investigations before they complete their home purchase. It's important to you to know if renovations were done with the required building permits, you'll have to carry out this detective work on your own.

Sellers must disclose to buyers if they are aware of any modifications to their home that were done without necessary building permits. But just because a seller discloses that he is not aware of any work done without permits doesn't mean that the appropriate permits were obtained. I find that most sellers claim to no nothing about permits for work.

Previous owners may have had work done without permits, and the current owner may not be aware of this. Also, it's quite common for home owners to assume that their contractors took out the necessary permits. But, some contractors bypass the permit process because it can be time consuming.

Why should you be concerned about the permit history of a home you're considering buying? One reason is for your own safety. Most permitted work requires periodic inspections by a city building inspector. This is to insure that the work is done in compliance with the current building codes. Although the permit process is not fail-proof, there is a higher likelihood that permitted work will comply with building health and safety codes.

Before you remove the inspection contingency from your purchase contract, visit the local building department. Ask to see a copy of the past permits on the property. First, check the permit record to see if there are any building permits that were taken out that did not receive the final O.K. from the building department. If there are, ask a building department official what will be required to get the final approval. You want to ask the sellers to complete this process as a condition of removing your inspection contingency.

You should also check the record to see if there are any obvious omissions. For example, if the kitchen is relatively new and the house was built in the 1920's, was a permit taken out recently to remodel the kitchen? If not ask the building department what the repercussions of this are. Will you be liable for past work?

Code compliance: Some building departments strictly enforce the permitting process. In some municipalities home buyers are informed at the time of purchase that they may be required to rectify work that was done without permits by previous owners. This means that if you want to take out a building permit to make modifications to the home in the future, you may be required to remedy a previous owner's misdeeds.

Unfortunately, city permit records are not always complete... If you find that a permit is missing, ask a building official how you might be affected by this in the future. The record keeping for these department vary greatly and they may only have records going back a few years.

Ask the seller for record they have on any work done during their ownership. Follow up buy asking the contractor who did the work about the job. They may reveal additional information.