

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE
CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT DIVISION
ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

CHAPTER 355-18-1
STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND CODE OF ETHICS

355-18-1-.01 Standards Of Practice For Home Inspectors.

(1) Definition of Terms. As used in Rules 355-18-1-.01 and .02, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

(a) Alarm Systems. Warning devices, installed or free-standing, including but not limited to: carbon monoxide detectors, flue gas and other spillage detectors, security equipment, ejector pumps and smoke alarms.

(b) Architectural Service. Any practice involving the art and science of building design for construction of any structure or grouping of structures and the use of space within and surrounding the structures or the design for construction, including but not specifically limited to, schematic design, design development, preparation of construction contract documents, and administration of the construction contract.

(c) Component. A part of a system.

(d) Decorative. Ornamental; not required for the operation of the essential systems and components of a home.

(e) Describe. To report a system or component by its type or other observed, significant characteristics to distinguish it from other systems or components.

(f) Dismantle. To take apart or remove any component, device or piece of equipment that would not be taken apart or removed by a homeowner in the course of normal and routine home owner maintenance.

(g) Engineering Service. Any professional service or creative work requiring engineering education, training, and experience and the application of special knowledge of the mathematical, physical and engineering sciences to such professional service or creative work as consultation, investigation, evaluation, planning, design and supervision of construction for the purpose of assuring compliance with the specifications and design, in conjunction with structures, buildings, machines, equipment, works or processes.

(h) Further Evaluation. Examination and analysis by a qualified professional, tradesman or service technician beyond that provided by the home inspection.

(i) Home Inspection. The process by which an inspector visually examines the readily accessible systems and components of a home and which describes those systems and components in accordance with these Standards of Practice.

(j) Household Appliances. Kitchen, laundry, and similar appliances, whether installed or free-standing.

(k) Inspect. To examine readily accessible systems and components of a building in accordance with these Standards of Practice, using normal operating controls and opening readily openable access panels.

(l) Inspector. A person hired to examine any system or component of a building in accordance with these Standards of Practice, including Home Inspectors as defined in Code of Ala. 1975, §34-14B-2(3).

(m) Installed. Attached such that removal requires tools.

(n) Normal Operating Controls. Devices such as thermostats, switches or valves intended to be operated by the homeowner.

(o) Readily Accessible. Available for visual inspection without requiring moving of personal property, dismantling, destructive measures, or any action which will likely involve risk to persons or property.

(p) Readily Openable Access Panel. A panel provided for homeowner inspection and maintenance that is within normal reach, can be removed by one person, and is not sealed in place.

(q) Recreational Facilities. Spas, saunas, steam baths, swimming pools, exercise, entertainment, athletic, playground or other similar equipment and associated accessories.

(r) Report. To communicate in writing.

(s) Representative Number. One component per room for multiple similar interior components such as windows and electric outlets; one component on each side of the building for multiple similar exterior components.

(t) Roof Drainage Systems. Components used to carry water off a roof and away from a building.

(u) Significantly Deficient. Unsafe or not functioning

(v) Shut Down. A state in which a system or component cannot be operated by normal operating controls.

(w) Solid Fuel Burning Appliances. A hearth and fire chamber or similar prepared place in which a fire may be built and which is built in conjunction with a chimney; or a listed assembly of a fire chamber, its chimney and related factory-made parts designed for unit assembly without requiring field construction.

(x) Structural Component. A component that supports non-variable forces or weights (dead loads) and variable forces or weights (live loads).

(y) System. A combination of interacting or interdependent components, assembled to carry out one or more functions.

(z) Technically Exhaustive. An investigation that involves dismantling, the extensive use of advanced techniques, measurements, instruments, testing, calculations or other means.

(aa) Under-floor Crawl Space. The area within the confines of the foundation and between the ground and the underside of the floor.

(bb) Unsafe. A condition in a readily accessible, installed system or component which is judged to be a significant risk of personal injury during normal, day-to-day use. The risk may be due to damage, deterioration, improper installation or a change in accepted residential construction standards.

(cc) Wiring Methods. Identification of electrical conductors or wires by their general type, such as "non-metallic sheathed cable" ("Romex"), "armored cable" ("bx") or "knob and tube," etc.

(2) Purpose and Scope

(a) The purpose of these Standards of Practice is to establish a minimum and uniform standard for inspectors. Home Inspections performed to these Standards of Practice are intended to provide the client with information regarding the condition of the systems and components of the home as inspected at the time of the Home Inspection.

(b) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

(i) readily accessible systems and components of homes listed in these Standards of Practice.

(ii) installed systems and components of homes listed in these Standards of Practice.

2. report:

(i) on those systems and components inspected which, in the professional opinion of the inspector, are significantly deficient or are near the end of their service lives.

(ii) a reason why, if not self-evident, the system or component is significantly deficient or near the end of its service life.

(iii) the inspector's recommendations to correct or monitor the reported deficiency.

(iv) on any systems and components designated for inspection in these Standards of Practice which were present at the time of the Home Inspection but were not inspected and a reason they were not inspected.

(c) These Standards of Practice are not intended to limit inspectors from:

1. including other inspection services, systems or components in addition to those required by these Standards of Practice.

2. specifying repairs, provided the inspector is appropriately qualified and willing to do so.

3. excluding systems and components from the inspection if requested by the client.

(3) Structural System

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

(i) the structural components including foundation and framing.

(ii) by probing a representative number of structural components where deterioration is suspected or where clear indications of possible deterioration exist. Probing is not required when probing would damage any finished surface or where no deterioration is visible.

2. describe:

- (i) the foundation and report the methods used to inspect the under-floor crawl space.
- (ii) the floor structure.
- (iii) the wall structure.
- (iv) the ceiling structure.
- (v) the roof structure and report the methods used to inspect the attic.

(b) The inspector is not required to:

- 1. provide any engineering service or architectural service.
- 2. offer an opinion as to the adequacy of any structural system or component.

(4) Exterior

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

- (i) the exterior wall covering, flashing and trim.
- (ii) all exterior doors.
- (iii) attached decks, balconies, stoops, steps, porches, and their associated railings.
- (iv) the eaves, soffits, and fascias where accessible from the ground level.
- (v) the vegetation, grading, surface drainage, and retaining walls on the property when any of these are likely to adversely affect the building.
- (vi) walkways, patios, and driveways leading to dwelling entrances.

2. describe the exterior wall covering.

(b) The inspector is not required to inspect:

- 1. screening, shutters, awnings, and similar seasonal accessories.
- 2. fences.
- 3. geological, geotechnical or hydrological conditions.

4. recreational facilities.
5. outbuildings.
6. seawalls, break-walls and docks.
7. erosion control and earth stabilization measures.

(5) Roof System

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

- (i) the roof covering.
- (ii) the roof drainage systems.
- (iii) the flashings.
- (iv) the skylights, chimneys, and roof penetrations.

2. describe the roof covering and report the methods used to inspect the roof

(b) The inspector is not required to inspect:

1. antennae.
2. interiors of flues or chimneys which are not readily accessible.
3. other installed accessories.

(6) Plumbing System

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

- (i) the interior water supply and distribution systems including all fixtures and faucets.
- (ii) the drain, waste and vent systems including all fixtures.
- (iii) the water heating equipment.
- (iv) the vent systems, flues, and chimneys.
- (v) the fuel storage and fuel distribution systems.

(vi) the drainage sumps, sump pumps, and related piping.

2. describe:

(i) the water supply, drain, waste, and vent piping materials.

(ii) the water heating equipment including the energy source.

(iii) the location of main water and main fuel shut-off valves.

(b) The inspector is not required to:

1. inspect:

(i) the clothes washing machine connections.

(ii) the interiors of flues or chimneys which are not readily accessible.

(iii) wells, well pumps, or water storage related equipment.

(iv) water conditioning systems.

(v) solar water heating systems.

(vi) fire and lawn sprinkler systems.

(vii) private waste disposal systems.

2. determine:

(i) whether water supply and waste disposal systems are public or private.

(ii) the quantity or quality of the water supply.

3. operate safety valves or shut-off valves.

(7) Electrical System

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

(i) the service drop.

(ii) the service entrance conductors, cables, and raceways.

- (iii) the service equipment and main disconnects.
- (iv) the service grounding.
- (v) the interior components of service panels and sub panels.
- (vi) the conductors.
- (vii) the overcurrent protection devices.
- (viii) a representative number of installed lighting fixtures, switches, and receptacles.
- (ix) the ground fault circuit interrupters.

2. describe:

- (i) the amperage and voltage rating of the service.
- (ii) the location of main disconnect(s) and sub panels.
- (iii) the wiring methods.

3. report:

- (i) on the presence of solid conductor aluminum branch circuit wiring.
- (ii) on the absence of smoke detectors.

(b) The inspector is not required to:

1. inspect:

- (i) the remote control devices unless the device is the only control device.
- (ii) the alarm systems and components.
- (iii) the low voltage wiring, systems and components.
- (iv) the ancillary wiring, systems and components not a part of the primary electrical power distribution system.

2. measure amperage, voltage or impedance.

(8) Heating System

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

- (i) the installed heating equipment.
- (ii) the vent systems, flues, and chimneys.

2. describe:

- (i) the energy source.
- (ii) the heating method by its distinguishing characteristics.

(b) The inspector is not required to:

1. inspect:

- (i) the interiors of flues or chimneys which are not readily accessible.
- (ii) the heat exchanger.
- (iii) the humidifier or dehumidifier.
- (iv) the electronic air filter.
- (v) the solar space heating system.

2. determine heat supply adequacy or distribution balance.

(9) Air Conditioning System

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect the installed central and through-wall cooling equipment.

2. describe:

- (i) the energy source.
- (ii) the cooling method by its distinguishing characteristics.

(b) The inspector is not required to:

1. inspect electronic air filters.

2. determine cooling supply adequacy or distribution balance.

(10) Interior

- (a) The inspector shall inspect:
 - 1. the walls, ceilings and floors.
 - 2. the steps, stairways, and railings.
 - 3. the countertops and a representative number of installed cabinets.
 - 4. a representative number of doors and windows.
 - 5. garage doors and garage door operators.
- (b) The inspector is not required to inspect:
 - 1. the paint, wallpaper, and other finish treatments.
 - 2. the carpeting.
 - 3. the window treatments.
 - 4. the central vacuum systems.
 - 5. the household appliances.
 - 6. recreational facilities.

(11) Insulation and Ventilation

- (a) The inspector shall:
 - 1. inspect:
 - (i) the insulation and vapor retarders in unfinished spaces.
 - (ii) the ventilation of attics and foundation areas.
 - (iii) the mechanical ventilation systems.
 - 2. describe:
 - (i) the insulation and vapor retarders in unfinished spaces.
 - (ii) the absence of insulation in unfinished spaces at conditioned surfaces.
- (b) The inspector is not required to:
 - 1. disturb insulation or vapor retarders.
 - 2. determine indoor air quality.

(12) Fireplaces and Solid Fuel Burning Appliances

(a) The inspector shall:

1. inspect:

- (i) the system components
- (ii) the vent systems, flues, and chimneys.

2. describe:

- (i) the fireplaces and solid fuel burning appliances.
- (ii) the chimneys.

(b) The inspector is not required to:

1. inspect:

- (i) the interiors of flues or chimneys.
- (ii) the firescreens and doors.
- (iii) the seals and gaskets.
- (iv) the automatic fuel feed devices.
- (v) the mantels and fireplace surrounds.
- (vi) the combustion make-up air devices.
- (vii) the heat distribution assists whether gravity controlled or fan assisted.

2. ignite or extinguish fires.

3. determine draft characteristics.

4. move fireplace inserts or stoves or firebox contents.

(13) General Limitations and Exclusions

(a) General limitations:

1. Inspections performed in accordance with these Standards of Practice

- (i) are not technically exhaustive.
- (ii) will not identify concealed conditions or latent defects.

2. These Standards of Practice are applicable to buildings with four or fewer dwelling units and their garages or carports.

(b) General exclusions:

1. The inspector is not required to perform any action or make any determination unless specifically stated in these Standards of Practice, except as may be required by other lawful authority.

2. Inspectors are not required to determine:

(i) the condition of systems or components which are not readily accessible.

(ii) the remaining life of any system or component.

(iii) the strength, adequacy, effectiveness, or efficiency of any system or component.

(iv) the causes of any condition or deficiency.

(v) the methods, materials, or costs of corrections.

(vi) future conditions including, but not limited to, failure of systems and components.

(vii) the suitability of the property for any specialized use.

(viii) compliance with regulatory requirements (codes, regulations, laws, ordinances, etc.)

(ix) the market value of the property or its marketability.

(x) the advisability of the purchase of the property.

(xi) the presence of potentially hazardous plants or animals including, but not limited to, wood destroying organisms or diseases harmful to humans.

(xii) the presence of any environmental hazards including, but not limited to, toxins, carcinogens, noise, and contaminants in soil, water, and air.

(xiii) the effectiveness of any system installed or methods utilized to control or remove suspected hazardous substances.

(xiv) the operating costs of systems or components.

- (xv) the acoustical properties of any systems or component.
3. Inspectors are not required to offer:
 - (i) or perform any act or service contrary to law.
 - (ii) or perform engineering services.
 - (iii) or perform work in any trade or any professional service other than home inspection.
 - (iv) warranties or guarantees of any kind.
 4. Inspectors are not required to operate:
 - (i) any system or component which is shut down or otherwise inoperable.
 - (ii) any system or component which does not respond to normal operating controls.
 - (iii) shut-off valves.
 5. Inspectors are not required to enter:
 - (i) any area which will, in the opinion of the inspector, likely be dangerous to the inspector or other persons or damage the property or its systems or components.
 - (ii) the under-floor crawl spaces or attics which are not readily accessible.
 6. Inspectors are not required to inspect:
 - (i) underground items including, but not limited to, underground storage tanks or other underground indications of their presence, whether abandoned or active.
 - (ii) systems or components which are not installed.
 - (iii) decorative items.
 - (iv) systems or components located in areas that are not entered in accordance with these Standards of Practice.
 - (v) detached structures other than garages and carports.

(vi) common elements or common areas in multi-unit housing, such as condominium properties or cooperative housing.

7. Inspectors are not required to:

(i) perform any procedure or operation which will, in the opinion of the inspector, likely be dangerous to the inspector or other persons or damage the property or its systems or components.

(ii) move suspended ceiling tiles, personal property, furniture, equipment, plants, soil, snow, ice, or debris.

(iii) dismantle any system or component, except as explicitly required by these Standards of Practice.

Author: The Alabama Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics for Home Inspectors are adopted from the American Society of Home Inspector's (ASHI) Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. The Alabama Building Commission gratefully acknowledges ASHI's consent.

Statutory Authority: Code of Ala. 1975, §§34-14B-1, et seq., 41-9-140, et seq.

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