

Don't wait with your compliance certificates

Many property sellers leave the application of their compliance certificates till the eleventh hour. This often causes delays in the transfer of property, especially if expensive remedial work is required. In some cases it has even resulted in the buyer walking away from the deal.

"Delays in applying for compliance certificate applications is something that every estate agent should ensure does not occur," says Tony Clarke of the Rawsons Property Group.

For their part, adds Clarke, buyers should appreciate that the certificates are not always 100% comprehensive and do not therefore give the home a complete clean bill of health.

"My advice to sellers," he says, "is to get the certificates before they even start talking to an estate agent or at the very latest as soon as they do so. As most of the certificates are valid for two years, they are very unlikely to need updating before the sale is processed. If the rectification of any faults discovered is costly that, regrettably, cannot be helped. There is in most cases no way that these costs can be passed onto the buyer. But, if the remedial work is not carried out under time constraints, it is very often possible to get competitive quotes and to pay less for the job."

With electrical certificates, says Clarke, it is important to realise that they can only be issued by an authorised electrician - and many electricians do not have the right to do this. It should also, he says, be appreciated that the certificate does not cover fixed appliances such as geysers, stoves and motors nor does it cover light bulbs, which are regarded as short term installations.

In certain homes, says Clarke, an extension to the electrical network may have been carried out without planning approval and the extension is therefore illegal. Such extensions may have to be removed in order to obtain the compliance certificate.

With the so-called plumbing certificates, says Clarke, buyers should realise that the certificate of compliance afforded to sellers is, in fact, a water installation certificate and not as comprehensive as a full scale plumbing certificate. The water installation certificate does not, for example, cover leaks in sewer or waste water systems and if any of the components are damaged, this may not be seen as a defect unless they are actually causing a loss of potable water.

With the gas compliance certificates, says Clarke, the primary goal is always simply to ensure that there are no leaks. The gas inspector will, however, also check to see that the prescribed emergency shutoff valves are in the right position and that the entire system is in working order. In particular he will check to see if the gas pipes are corroded.

Whether placed inside or outside the building, he says, the gas cylinders have to be stipulated distances away from any possible electrical ignition points - and the maximum volumes allowed for interior and exterior must not be exceeded. These volume rulings, says Clarke, are especially stringent if the cylinder is installed above ground level, i.e. on a first, second or higher floor.

Beetle compliance certificates, says Clarke, are not actually required by law but since the mid-twentieth Century epidemic of beetle infestation experienced throughout South Africa, most home finance organisations will not lend money for the purchase of a home unless it has been inspected by a member of the SA Pest Control Association.

Should such an inspector find traces of any wood destroying insects, it will be essential to carry out the treatment programme recommended and in some cases to replace the infested timbers before the home can be offered for sale. If a home is sold with a guarantee that it is free of beetles and this is found not to be the case, the seller will be liable for the entire repair bill.

These days, adds Clarke, if the home has an electrified fence it will also be necessary to get a compliance certificate for this. Such certificates are not, as many people believe, part of the general electrical certificate of compliance. The issue of the electrical fence certificate has to be approved by the Department of Labour and it is usually preferable to appoint the original installer to do the inspection, especially if a maintenance contract is still in place.

In recent years, says Clarke, thieves in South Africa have become highly skilled in gaining access to properties, even when there is an electric fence and can do so without setting off the alarm. Attention to electrified fencing is therefore increasingly important and these days the more sophisticated the installation, the better. If possible, he says, it should be backed up by a CCTV system.

"All these certificates of compliance," says Clarke, "although seen by sellers as a nuisance, have helped to make home buying far less risky. They should not, therefore, be resented - and much angst will be avoided if they are attended to at the start of the sale process and not towards the end of it as all too often happens."

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