

4. Building codes

A property inspection is not a substitute for a building inspection or a code compliance inspection, and I do not interpret or cite building codes. The main reason for this is because of the many codes involved in a property inspection. For example, the licensed plumber is only required to know the plumbing codes, and the licensed electrician is only required to know the electrical codes. If you've ever seen either of those two code books, you'd understand why property inspectors don't cite codes.

Obviously, a working knowledge and a basic understanding of the many codes is a basic knowledge requirement for property inspectors, but inspecting for code compliance and interpreting building codes is the sole and legal responsibility of municipal authorities. A property inspector inspects the visible and accessible areas of a home in accordance with generally accepted national inspection standards.

General code guidelines typically state that building codes are not retroactive in most situations, that buildings are required to be maintained under the code that was in effect at the time of original construction, and that such requirements remain true as long as the building is used for its original intended purpose. However, there's no way that any property inspector anywhere is going to know all the various codes for as long as codes have been in existence. Therefore, there's no way a property inspector can comment on codes that were in existence when a home was built in 1955 since codes get updated very two or three years. However, we can use what's in the current codes as a basis for recommending various upgrades. After all, if it is in the current codes, but it's not in the property we're inspecting, we can normally presume that it was not in the codes at the time the property was built.

Of course, general guidelines also state that alterations or repairs must conform to the various building codes required for a new structure without requiring the existing structure to comply with all of the requirements of the codes. Those guidelines go on to state that additions, alterations, or repairs must not cause an existing structure to become unsafe or adversely affect the performance of the building.

So if anyone's response to an area of concern or a recommendation in **Your Home Inspection Report** is, “Well, they didn't have that (or they didn't do that) when the house was built,” I know that. However, during the ensuing years, our knowledge has increased considerably concerning safety in the home, and I believe that you should be safe in your home and that taking care of your home should be as easy as possible. So I will recommend things that they didn't have or didn't do years ago simply to keep you safe or help you take care of your home.

Remember that building codes are developed by nationwide experts in particular topic areas. They are then sent to the state where some home builders, a few experts, and politicians decide what is going to be enforced in the state. They are then sent to the local level where mostly home builders and politicians decide what's going to be enforced locally. They are then given to the code enforcement inspectors to interpret according to how they read the code. In addition, the local code often lags several years behind the national codes. Building codes are not lofty standards. They are the bare minimum legal standard that a home builder, electrician, plumber, etc., must comply with. To do anything less would be illegal.

ASPEC Residential Services serves a large area of Northwestern Ohio with many different building code enforcement authorities, each with their own individual interpretations of the national and state building codes based on their local politics and beliefs. I cannot be completely conversant with each and every building code enforcement authority's interpretation of the national building codes; therefore I do not perform code compliance inspections nor do I guarantee that all items are in compliance with governing codes, regulations, ordinances, statutes, covenants, and manufacturer specifications. My references and sources for calling out different items as a safety concern, or defective, or marginal, or in need of repair may include the national building codes (International Residential Code, National Electric Code, Uniform Plumbing Code, etc.), manufacturer's instructions, the building industry's standards, continuing education, and personal experience.