

## Vacant residence (or houses that haven't been lived in for an extended period)

A vacant residence is nice to inspect since I don't have to worry about breaking the priceless antiques, but it does present its own types of problems. Although vacant residences are typically unfurnished, meaning that I can see virtually everything, residences that are vacant for any period of time can be expected to present problems when you move in. Some structural and mechanical components and systems that have not been used on a daily basis can be expected to fail when you first use them, and deferred maintenance items may be present by the time escrow closes due to lack of daily use and care.

A home and its systems and components are meant to be used, meaning that a fully functioning home requires proper use, care, and maintenance.

When a residence is vacant, there is no one to do regular monitoring and maintenance. Think about the “haunted house” in your neighborhood or city when you were growing up. It was vacant and dilapidated, and deterioration was continuing on a daily basis because no one was around to take care of it (see Figure 1). Same thing goes with any vacant residence, new or used. Things start deteriorating immediately.

Deterioration is an ongoing process; it does not quit simply because a residence is vacant. And it doesn't delay its start simply because it is a brand new structure that hasn't even been lived in for six months. There will be problems if you are taking over any kind of vacant residence.

I recommend that, before moving in, you compile a list of qualified service personnel (plumber, electrician, appliance repair, etc.) and telephone numbers to assist you in the event of any [emergency](#). There are several sources to find good, qualified professionals to help you:

- ü My personal referrals
- ü the list that Realtor's offices typically keep to help their Clients
- ü Better Business Bureau, [bbb.org](http://bbb.org)
- ü [www.DoneRight.com](http://www.DoneRight.com)
- ü <http://www.angieslist.com>

If the residence has been vacant for more than a few days prior to the property inspection, there is a possibility that the testing I did during the property inspection might have actually caused some problems. For example, the most common problem caused by property inspections in vacant residences has to do with plumbing leaks. When water faucets and drain pipes are not used for a relatively long time, their rubber sealing components can dry out and harden. The first time they are used, then, such as at a property inspection, might result in damage to interior components, such as o-rings at the water faucet. The damage might not be apparent until you turn the water faucet on when you move in. The simple act of turning the faucets on at the time of the inspection might have damaged the dried out, hardened o-ring while your first operation of the same faucet after you move in actually dislodged the o-ring fragments and caused the faucet or handles to start leaking. It's no one's “fault,” really; it's



Figure 1. “Haunted houses” come about due to lack of maintenance, typically from not being lived in for extended periods of time.

just a consequence of what happens with vacant homes—when homes are not lived in, used, and maintained on a daily basis.

Hydrogen gas can accumulate in hot water systems that have not been operated for a period of time, such as in vacant residences. Under adverse conditions, this hydrogen gas can cause fires at faucets and explosions at water-using appliances, such as dishwashers. If your home has been vacant for more than a few days, flush the hot water system by turning on all hot water faucets and letting them running for several minutes. Do not use the hot water faucets near any open flames (cigarettes, candles, etc.) and do not use any hot-water-using appliances (dishwasher) or nearby heat-producing appliances (cook top, etc.) until the hot water system has been flushed. In multi-story residences, start turning on hot water faucets on the highest floor first and work your way down to lower floors.