



Your Best & Safest Choice

Building codes

A home inspection is not a substitute for a building inspection or a code compliance inspection, nor do home inspectors interpret or cite building codes. The main reason for this is because of the many codes involved in a home 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 home inspectors don't cite codes. Combine the sheer size of those two code books with the International Residential Code, the Illinois & Missouri Building Code, the Uniform Plumbing Code, the Uniform Building Code, and so many others covering every aspect of building construction, as well as the fact that different jurisdictions might be working under different codes, and you'll understand even better why home inspectors don't cite codes.

Obviously, a working knowledge and a basic understanding of the many codes is a basic knowledge requirement for home inspectors, but inspecting for code compliance and interpreting building codes is the sole and legal responsibility of municipal authorities. A home inspector inspects the visible and accessible areas of a home in accordance with generally accepted national [home 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 home 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 home 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 your response, your Realtor's response, or the seller's response to an area of concern or a recommendation in your property 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.

A good example of a safety item is the installation of [GFCI safety outlets](#), outlets typically with the red and black buttons on them. They are inexpensive, life-saving devices that have only been around for about

twenty years. I recommend that [GFCI safety outlets](#) be installed where there is water, electricity, and metal-encased appliances, most typically the kitchen, bathrooms, laundry, garage, and exterior locations.