

Question:

Are home inspectors supposed to tell you if your house foundation wasn't built to code?

We bought a home and it is sagging in the middle because the support beams under the house weren't built properly, or to code. Unfortunately, we didn't find this out from the home inspector we paid to inspect the house before we bought it. So what did we pay him for? Asked by Joseph D., Los Altos, California

Answer:

Under the CREIA (California Real Estate Inspection Association) – of which I'm a member, and the ASHI (American Society of Home inspectors) Standards of Practice, Home Inspectors are NOT required to determine: Compliance with regulatory requirements (**codes**, regulations, laws, or ordinances)

The Standards of Practice do state that: The Inspector shall inspect Structural components, including the foundation and framing; and, the Inspector shall report on those systems and components that are not functioning properly, **significantly deficient**, unsafe, or are near the end of their service lives.

Therefore, while your inspector didn't have to report code compliance with the constructed elements of your foundation framing, the 'sagging of framing elements in the middle' is something your inspector should have observed and reported to you as 'significantly deficient'. Most home inspectors are not sufficiently experienced or qualified to make such assessments, let alone report them, and certainly not offer an appropriate repair recommendation. Usually, all you get is "have an Architect/Engineer/Contractor/other?" further investigate this issue and follow their recommendations! This is an unfortunate circumstance. I cringe when a potential client is 'shopping' for a cheap price for their home inspection, not realizing how important it is to secure the services of a competent, experience home inspector. In this case, when they are 'shopping' for price, they undoubtedly will "get what they paid for".

In California, my state, State law prohibits a home inspector from offering engineering or architectural diagnosis and recommendations UNLESS they are a licensed Architect or Engineer. As a licensed Architect for over 22 years, and an experienced General Contractor for over 17 years, who has designed and built many single family and multi-family residential housing units; and a residential Home Inspector for over 19 years, I can and do make appropriate engineering assessments and recommendations for repair. Very few inspectors are either a licensed Architect or Engineer. As an International Code Council Certified Residential Building Inspector, I often include significant code violations in my reports. Again, many home inspectors don't know enough, or are not qualified, to comment on code issues or to assess the causes of such a problem.

That said, there are a good number of home inspectors who are competent, conscientious and capable, and would have picked up on the problem you had with your support framing. There are only a few of us that can actually diagnose and give the appropriate repair recommendations for such a problem.

So, the short answer to your question is – NO. The long answer is of course noted above, and the "moral of the story" is – spend some time researching who you are about to hire to inspect your future home, and the cost of the inspection should be one of your last questions, not the first – as is most typically the case! Finally, to protect yourself, HIRE AN EXPERIENCED, LICENSED PROFESSIONAL, a real home inspector!

With an AIS Home Inspection, performed by a licensed Architect, General Contractor, and experienced homebuilder and inspector, you will get: 1) a professional report that identifies such issues; 2) specific recommendations for repair of this type of problem (State law dictates that only a licensed Architect and/or Engineer can provide such specific repair recommendations), and; 3) an accurate Estimated Cost for the appropriate repairs – a service other home inspectors simply do not or can not provide! Why pay for an 'incomplete' report – with numerous outside referrals required to get a correct diagnosis and costs for repairs? Don't settle for anything less than a complete AIS Home Inspection and Report!

