

# Professional standards of practice for residential building inspection

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
ORDRE DES ARCHITECTES DU QUÉBEC  
ORDRE DES ÉVALUATEURS AGRÉÉS DU QUÉBEC  
ORDRE DES TECHNOLOGUES PROFESSIONNELS DU QUÉBEC

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## Chapter 1 Standards of practice

### Section I Preamble:

1. These standards are a result of a consensus of the three professional orders involved in building inspections, i.e., the Ordre des architectes du Québec, the Ordre des évaluateurs agréés du Québec, and the Ordre des technologues professionnels du Québec.
2. The orders are professional associations created by virtue of the *Professional Code of Québec*. Their mandate is to ensure the protection of the public by controlling the exercise of the profession by their members.
3. Within this legal context, these standards constitute the minimum required by the three orders to supervise the professional act of building inspection. In particular, inspectors, members of one of these orders, are required to respect these standards and to obtain professional liability insurance for this action, in addition to be subject to the professional inspection mechanism of their order. They shall respect their code of ethics and collaborate with the syndic's inquiry if a client complaints about their professional services.
4. The professional practice standards are designed to:
  - 4.1° provide a reference document to members of the orders acting as building inspectors to guide their professional practice, by establishing obligatory standards to be respected both during the inspection and in writing the report.

- 4.2° define certain terms related to building inspection in order to ensure as uniform comprehension and interpretation as possible;
  - 4.3° inform the public about obligations related to the terms and scope of services rendered by building inspectors.
5. The standards of practice were established recognizing that inspection of a residential building does not correspond to an assessment or a verification of conformance to the codes and standards governing the construction sector.

## **Section II**

### Scope

6. The current standards of practice apply to pre-purchase inspections of residential buildings containing no more than six dwellings.

## **Section III**

### Requirement for an agreement

7. For each inspection, the inspector shall create a written service agreement that confirms the application of these standards of practice. Prior to beginning the inspection, the inspector shall provide the client with a copy of the agreement as well as these standards of practice.

## **Section IV**

### Interpretation

8. Unless the context requires otherwise, the definitions in Appendix I of these standards form an integral part thereof.
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## **Chapter 2**

### Definition of the building inspection

#### **Section I**

##### Definition of the building inspection

9. Unless provisions establish otherwise, the building inspection consists of a careful visual examination of the main building to determine the physical condition of its systems and their components, as noted on the date of the inspection, and to report thereon. Any additional service shall be the subject of a particular mandate.
10. The inspection is not technically exhaustive. It focuses on the installed systems and their components that are easily accessible without risk to the safety of persons present or to property being inspected.
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## **Chapter 3**

### Features of the building inspection

#### **Section I**

##### Carrying out the inspection

11. During the inspection, the inspector shall take note of any sign of water infiltration in the building or significant condensation on any building components.

## **Section II**

### Structural components

12. The inspector shall examine the structural systems and components, including:
  - 1° the foundations;
  - 2° the floors;
  - 3° the walls;
  - 4° the columns;
  - 5° the ceilings;
  - 6° the roofs.
13. The inspector shall probe structural components that appear to have deteriorated, unless such an action would have the effect of damaging a finished surface.
14. The inspector shall enter crawl spaces, attics and roof spaces in which clearance is salubrious, safe and of reasonable dimensions, and for which access does not require the use of tools.

## **Section III**

### The exterior

15. The inspector shall examine:
  - 1° exterior wall facings, flashings;
  - 2° installed windows and doors;
  - 3° electric garage door control devices;
  - 4° protrusions (terraces, balconies, entrance steps, etc.);
  - 5° eaves, including, fascias and soffits;
  - 6° vegetation, ground slopes, water runoff, garage entrances, entrance walkways, retaining walls, with regard to their effect on the condition of the building.
16. The inspector is not required to examine:
  - 1° removable storm windows, storm doors, screens, shutters, awnings and other similar seasonal accessories not permanently installed;
  - 2° fences;
  - 3° security glazing;
  - 4° garage door remote devices;
  - 5° geological and geotechnical conditions.
17. The inspector shall inform the client of the risks inherent to electric garage door control devices.

## **Section IV**

### Roofing

#### **The roof**

18. The inspector shall examine:
  - 1° roof coverings;
  - 2° water drainage systems;
  - 3° flashings;
  - 4° skylights, chimney exteriors and structural roof penetrations.
19. The inspector is not required to render an opinion on the status of accessories (solar panels, antennas, etc.).

#### **Attic space**

20. The inspector shall examine:
  - 1° structural elements;
  - 2° roof support layers (decking);

- 3° insulation of unfinished attics;
- 4° the presence of a vapour barrier;
- 5° attic space ventilation elements;
- 6° type of insulation;
- 7° clearance of combustible materials around the chimney.

## **Section V**

### **Plumbing**

- 21. The inspector shall open the faucets of plumbing fixtures. He/she is not required to open any other type of faucet or valve.
- 22. The inspector shall examine the visible interior water distribution system, including:
  - 1° water supply and distribution piping materials;
  - 2° fixtures and faucets;
  - 3° functional flow of water;
  - 4° leaks;
  - 5° cross connections.
- 23. The inspector shall examine the visible internal drainage system, including:
  - 1° U-bends and J-bends; discharge pipes and vents; pipe supports;
  - 2° cleanouts and backflow valve;
  - 3° leakage;
  - 4° efficiency of evacuation.
- 24. The inspector shall examine the hot water production system, including:
  - 1° water heating equipment;
  - 2° automatic safety devices.
- 25. The inspector shall examine retention pit evacuation systems and components.
- 26. The inspector shall obtain information from the seller regarding water supply and wastewater discharge connections to a public or private system.
- 27. The inspector is not required to examine:
  - 1° water treatment systems;
  - 2° automatic water extinguisher systems;
  - 3° lawn sprinkler systems;
  - 4° water quality;
  - 5° garbage disposal systems;
  - 6° foundation drainage systems;
  - 7° spas, swimming pools, saunas, whirlpool bathtubs and other similar equipment.

## **Section VI**

### **Electricity**

- 28. The inspector shall examine:
  - 1° the electric service entrance;
  - 2° grounding equipment, the general protection device, the main panel, distribution panels and their location;
  - 3° the ampere rating and rated voltage of the installation;
  - 4° functioning of a representative number of installed light fixtures, switches and electric outlets within the building and on the exterior;
  - 5° polarity and the grounding of all outlets located:
    - near interior plumbing fixtures;
    - in the garage or carport;
    - on exterior walls of inspected buildings;
  - 6° the operation of ground fault circuit interrupters.

29. The inspector shall report the presence of any aluminum cable in branch circuits.
30. The inspector is not required to open electrical panels.
31. The inspector is not required to verify or turn on overcurrent protective devices except for ground fault circuit interrupters.
32. The inspector is not required to examine:
  - 1° low voltage systems;
  - 2° security systems.
  - 3° telephone, security, cable television wiring and other auxiliary networks not part of the main electricity distribution system.

## **Section VII**

### Heating

33. The inspector shall examine permanently installed heating systems, including:
  - 1° the primary heat production system and its power source;
  - 2° the heat distribution system;
  - 3° the usual start-up mechanisms;
  - 4° automatic safety devices;
  - 5° the presence of heat sources in every inhabitable room.
34. The inspector shall turn on the systems using the usual start-up mechanisms.
35. The inspector is not required to turn on heating systems if, taking into account climatic conditions or other circumstances, damage to the equipment could result. Nor is he/she required to operate automatic safety devices.
36. The inspector is not required to examine:
  - 1° the interior of a heat production device, in particular a combustion chamber;
  - 2° conformity to applicable standards of the solid fuel burning heating systems, chimneys and accessories;
  - 3° humidifiers;
  - 4° electronic air filters;
  - 5° the consistency or sufficiency of heat supply in each room.
37. The inspector is not required to open the access panels of any device whatsoever.

## **Section VIII**

### Ventilation and air conditioning

38. The inspector shall examine the central air conditioning system, including its energy source and the type of cooling installation.
39. The inspector shall examine the air evacuation and ventilation systems.
40. The inspector shall turn on the systems using the usual start-up mechanisms.
41. The inspector is not required to turn on cooling systems if, taking into account climatic conditions or other circumstances, damage to the equipment could result.
42. The inspector is not required to examine air conditioning devices not part of a central system.
43. The inspector is not required to verify if the cold air supply for each room is consistent or sufficient.

## **Section IX**

### **Interior**

44. The inspector shall examine:
    - 1° walls, floors and ceilings;
    - 2° steps, staircases, balconies and railings;
    - 3° cabinets and counter-tops;
    - 4° windows and doors, including those separating living spaces from a garage;
    - 5° the gas-tightness of walls, doors and ceilings separating living spaces from a garage;
    - 6° water retention pits.
  45. The inspector shall open a representative number of permanent windows and interior doors.
  46. The inspector is not required to examine the condition of:
    - 1° the paint, wallpaper and other wall finishings, ceilings and Interior floors;
    - 2° carpeting;
    - 3° curtains, blinds and other window accessories;
    - 4° household appliances;
    - 5° recreational facilities.
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## **Chapter 4**

### **The building inspection report**

#### **Section I**

#### **The building inspection report**

47. After analyzing the results of the visual building inspection, the inspector shall provide the client with a written report. This report, in a narrative format, shall comply with these standards of practice, be dated and signed by the professional who carried out the inspection. In addition, it shall conform to the requirements of the professional order of which the inspector is a member.
  48. The inspection report:
    - 1° reports everything that was observed and examined by the inspector;
    - 2° indicates the date, time, weather conditions and the names of persons present at the inspection;
    - 3° indicates the name of the person requesting the inspection and the purpose for which it was conducted;
    - 4° describes the building systems and components listed in these standards as well as their respective condition, if observable;
    - 5° indicates the method and equipment used to carry out the visual examination of some of them, where appropriate (binoculars, ladder, etc.);
    - 6° provides, in application of these standards, the reasons for which certain systems and their components were not inspected, as applicable;
    - 7° mentions, if applicable, the impossibility of turning on certain devices;
    - 8° reports observations of any signs of water penetration in the building or significant condensation on building components;
    - 9° contains a summary of the inspector's findings regarding the elements that require immediate or major repair or represent a dangerous situation;
    - 10° contains a number of photographs to illustrate the inspector's principal findings;
    - 11° mentions information obtained from the seller regarding water supply and wastewater discharge connections to a public or private system.
  49. The inspection report may contain other information, comment or additional descriptions beyond those required by article 48.
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## **Chapter 5**

### **General exclusions and limitations**

## **Section I**

### **General exclusions and limitations**

50. During the building inspection, the inspector is not required to:
- 1° operate any component or system apparently non-functional or lacking the usual start-up mechanism;
  - 2° turn on devices or systems powered by fossil fuel or other systems which could present a hazard;
  - 3° move objects, furniture, or equipment which obstructs access or impair visibility; Nor is he/she required to clear snow or any other exterior obstacle that obstructs or impairs visibility;
  - 4° record the presence of hazardous substances, including toxins, carcinogens, soil, water or air contaminants, problematic soil components, nor provide an opinion about noise;
  - 5° open access panels for plumbing, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.
51. The visual inspection does not include:
- 1° start-up of any fire alarm or security alarm system;
  - 2° start-up of any electronic or home automation systems;
  - 3° verification of household appliances;
  - 4° inspection of recreational facilities;
  - 5° verification of any underground elements, including buried tanks, septic tanks, septic fields, wells, underground pipes and foundation drains;
  - 6° evaluation of the service life of a component or system, nor the calculation or assessment of their efficiency and their usefulness;
  - 7° evaluation of the methods, materials and costs related to corrections to be made to systems and their components;
  - 8° assessment of the building market value;
  - 9° assessment of the compatibility of the building with any specific purpose other than the one for which it was used on the inspection date;
  - 10° offering one or more guarantees of any sort on equipment and systems;
  - 11° the recommendation in favour or against purchasing the property.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Definitions**

#### **Component**

An easily observable part of a system, such as a wall or a floor, but not the individual parts (nails, plates or screws) that, when assembled, form the component.

#### **Crawl space**

Low-ceilinged space within the perimeter of the main building and located directly under the lowest floor of the structure.

#### **Examine**

To observe carefully.

#### **Exhaustive**

Treating a subject in depth.

#### **Functional flow**

The amount of water sufficient to use plumbing fixtures normally.

#### **Home automation system**

Relates to electronic management of a dwelling.

#### **Narrative report**

A detailed report on the investor's observations (in contrast to the Quick reference list)

#### **Representative number**

One component in each room for multiple identical components.  
 One component on each exterior side of the building in the case of multiple identical exterior components.

**System**

Set of components assembled to carry out one or several functions.

**Usual start-up mechanism**

The part commonly used to turn on or turn off the element or system (unit, wall or remote switch)

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