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## Insist on fireplace inspection when purchasing home

I was reviewing an offer to purchase a Toronto house last week and was surprised to see a condition that I had never seen before in an offer on a city home.

The clause made the agreement conditional on the buyer obtaining a satisfactory Wood Energy Technology Transfer (WETT) inspection report for the fireplace in the house.

In Canada, Wood Energy Technology Transfer Inc. ([www.wettinc.ca](http://www.wettinc.ca)) is a non-profit training and education association. It functions as the national registrar of the WETT program, promoting the safe and effective use of wood-burning systems in Canada.

It also maintains a WETT training program to provide training to installers and inspectors of wood burning systems.

Typically, a WETT inspection is required for cottages and rural properties which contain woodstoves. Many of these stoves are "weekend jobs" where the homeowner bought and installed a woodstove without the involvement of a professional.

Often these do-it-yourself jobs are either not installed properly, or the chimney, walls and roof have not been adequately insulated against the heat of the appliance.

A WETT inspection clause is rare to non-existent in Toronto. The offer I was looking at was prepared by Jos Arias, an agent with Sutton Group-Bayview Realty Inc. The WETT clause was inserted on the instructions of his clients, and Arias emailed me to ask if the clause was necessary or even relevant for a house where there was a fireplace but no woodstove.

Much to the surprise of both of us, it seems that a WETT inspection is highly recommended for city homes which have wood-burning fireplaces.

Evoone Brant, association administrator of WETT Inc., in Toronto, says that purchasers of homes with fireplaces should always insist on an inspection report by a WETT-certified professional.

A WETT inspection report details the areas in which the fire-burning installation meets or does not meet the manufacturer's instructions and the appropriate building codes.

A typical building inspection will not be sufficient if the home has a fireplace or woodstove. Unless a home inspector has a WETT certification, a separate inspection of the fireplace by a certified technician is required.

The issue is more than certifying the original installation. The WETT report will also note whether it is still safe to use the fireplace.

If fireplaces are improperly used and maintained, they can be dangerous to the homeowner and could also prevent a buyer from getting home insurance.

An unsafe fireplace may have a buildup of creosote. This flammable substance is hard, dark and crustlike and is produced during incomplete combustion of wood, and when it accumulates inside the fireplace or chimney over time, it can cause a fire.

Soot is also a flammable deposit, dark in colour but softer than creosote. Most chimney sweeps recommend cleaning when soot deposits reach 1/8-inch in depth.

For safety reasons, fireplaces should always have a glass or mesh screen to prevent sparks from escaping and igniting an adjacent wood or carpet floor.

A complete inspection might involve checking whether the chimney has a cap with wire mesh sides to keep rain, birds, animals, and debris from entering. The outer mortar between the bricks or stone of the chimney will be examined to make sure it is intact. The inspector also looks for cracked tile liners or missing bricks, and dents, rust and missing screws on metal chimneys.

All homes with fuel-fired appliances should have both a carbon monoxide (CO) detector and a smoke detector. This is especially important if the home has a fireplace or woodstove, or both.

If a wood-burning stove or fireplace is not used and maintained correctly, the results can be disastrous and even fatal.

A WETT inspection is an important part of a home purchase, and an inspection condition should always be inserted into an agreement of purchase and sale where the home has a fireplace or a woodstove.

**Update:** Last week's column was about a court case where two home buyers recovered \$110,700 in damages against the sellers for negligent misrepresentation in a Seller's Property Information Statement. The sellers have now served a notice of appeal on the buyers. The saga continues.