

Morris Charney wrote:

October 18, 2007 Hi Denis, I thought I would write to you about a matter that concerns me a great deal because it relates to building inspection, an activity you and I have been doing for a long time in order to earn our livelihood. The day I first discovered the IHINA website I was delighted; I had a lot of admiration for what you had accomplished. I always believed that the reason little or no progress was being made in regard to the quality of inspections was because of the conflict of interest issue. Real estate agents were steering clients to building inspectors who were adept at not finding defects, individuals who had no conscience in regard to the task they were being asked to perform, no compassion for the homebuyer who was being stretched to the limit in making the purchase and would not likely have sufficient funds to do the necessary repairs. I had a lot of experience as a renovation architect and believed this knowledge could be helpful in doing prepurchase inspections. It didn't take long for agents to label me as a troublemaker or to be given the derogatory title of a dealbreaker. I witnessed a very successful agent who convinced her husband to start doing building inspections based on her referrals. They were so successful as a team that they even got their son to join in and do prepurchase inspections. The father and the son had the same initial and so when a referral was made, either one of them could show up. It didn't really matter because between them they had very little construction experience and were incapable of identifying defects. I was appalled, but the agents loved them. They prospered.

I've been doing prepurchase building inspections for 40 years and I must say the quality of the typical report has not improved. Certainly the lack of independence of the building inspector is still the major issue. I believe that agents foster incompetence out of self-interest, in order to facilitate sale transactions.

However, I now have a new pet peeve. I am even reluctant to steer clients to the IHINA website because of this new concern. I always had my doubts about checklists. I have never used them. It makes the work boring. I enjoy the aspect of discovery, playing the role of detective. Could you imagine a detective walking around with a computer generated checklist of some 500 items? When Carson and Dunlop first came out with their building inspector's package basically centered on a checklist, I thought it wouldn't catch on. I was wrong. It would seem that most building inspectors use these checklists. Many are listed under IHINA. Recently a friend of mine had called regarding their son's purchase of a hundred-year-old home in the Detroit/Windsor area. I had referred the call to the IHINA website. Subsequently, after the purchase took place, I was asked to visit the house and evaluate the inspection report. Inspection lists that include categories such as "satisfactory" and "fair" which are then checked off are quite meaningless. Looking at the definition given to "fair" which was ticked off most often, I was astounded to learn in the index that it could mean anything from monitoring the defect, replacing the component, or repairing it. Such reports lack any kind of precision. It is as if the inspector is always sitting on the fence, not taking any decision. The report is typically full of disclaimers. I really believe that in order to communicate clearly one should be writing reports that are in the narrative form. One should write in an un-equivocal manner. Check list type reports have gotten so superficial that my current recommendation is for home purchasers to take the time to do their own inspections because it is likely to be more thorough.

Morris Charney, architect and building inspector.

-----Original Message----- **From:** Dennis Robitaille  
[mailto:ihina@comcast.net] **Sent:** Thursday, October 18, 2007 8:03 PM  
**To:** Morris Charney **Subject:** Re: check lists

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Dennis Robitaille [<mailto:ihina@comcast.net>]

**Sent:** Thursday, October 18, 2007 7:06 PM

**To:** Morris Charney

**Subject:** Re: check lists

Morris,

I agree 100% with you. My problem is that nowadays my ambition in this field is limited.

I have neither the desire or drive to start pushing the standards of inspecting to our level. (I spent the 90's trying to do that)

I was hoping that IHINA would inspire others to carry the professional to new levels.

As it is, IHINA has helped the field take a step forward, but as you have found out, it has not helped to raise the service level of the field.

If other States or Provinces passed laws similar to MA, the checklist reports would likely fade away as competition for clients without the involvement of agents would force inspectors to offer more in depth and professional style reports.

The 100 year old Victorian house I did yesterday took 5 hours to inspect, 4 hours to edit photos and 4 hours to write up.

(I might have to start limiting myself to only a half a house per day.)

Dennis

Morris Charney wrote:

Dennis it takes me typically 12 to 15 hours as well. I think anyone who has been able to accomplish what you have so far can take it to the next step. Even if you tried it in the 90's, you should still bring up the matter of quality or content from time to time. Something has to be done about those check lists. I wish you could include that kind of basic information in the IHINA listings for each member—two very distinctive categories --checklist vs. narrative. I would also include two categories in regard to photos—photos showing a close up of defects vs photos of a general descriptive nature. It takes a hell of a long time to take, select and enlarge photos that clearly illustrate defects. Throwing in a bunch of general view photos (similar to those used in real estate listings) together with a checklist is mindless.

-----Original Message----- **From:** Dennis Robitaille

[<mailto:ihina@comcast.net>] **Sent:** Thursday, October 18, 2007 8:03 PM

**To:** Morris Charney **Subject:** Re: check lists

Morris, Again, I agree that putting the type of report the inspector does on the web site is a good idea. But I already know that I would get hammered with complaints from members who would staunchly defend their method of reporting. I tried several years ago to require IHINA members to pass the National Home

Inspectors exam and was given an earfull about how little it means to pass that test. Dennis

-----Original Message----- **From:** Morris Charney [mailto:mcharney@videotron.ca]

**Sent:** Thursday, October 18, 2007 8:55 PM **To:** 'Dennis Robitaille' **Subject:** RE: check lists

Dennis,

Revealing the type of report that an inspector does: checklist vs narrative, photo enlargement of defects vs general view photos -- reveals a great deal without taking a position or without offending anyone. No one should feel offended or have this to defend the methods they use. The information does not have to be presented in a derogatory fashion. I don't even feel the NHI exams or any other competency standards are necessary because, as in a Court of law, an expert in construction does not require a formal education and could have reached the same level of knowledge by virtue of hands on experience. Most judges recognize that. My point is that checklists have become the preferred method of the vast majority of prepurchase building inspectors. I would guess over 90%. These are the guys that are charging \$300-\$500 per inspection and can knock out a few inspections a day. They have priced the real professionals out of the market. A free-market can rectify such matters but only if the public is well-informed. I see the problem as -- the overwhelming acceptance of checklists as being the norm for prepurchase building inspections. I think you're writing about it or mentioning it from time to time would really be helpful. Including that basic information in the IHINA member list would be even better. Thanks. Morris