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Repair Requests on Home Buying and Selling

Requesting Seller Repairs

By [Elizabeth Weintraub](#), About.com Guide

Every house needs [repairs](#)¹. There is no perfect house. If a house were perfect, everything would break or fall apart at the same time. But as it is, the envelope of a home: its roof, floors, walls, windows, structural support members, all have different life spans. Although, today, many appliances seem to stop working as soon as the warranties expire. But if you're looking for a perfect house, you can stop [home searching](#)² now. It doesn't exist.



Just because a buyer requests repairs doesn't mean a seller must honor that request.

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It doesn't really matter whether the home is [newer or older](#)³, a home inspection is still likely to turn up a list of repairs. An older home, of course, will likely generate a longer laundry list of repair items. The objectives are to figure out which repairs are serious or safety issues and to determine whether a seller will honor a buyer's request for repairs.

Get a Professional Home Inspection

- Sellers will be reluctant to listen to or negotiate a request for repair from a buyer without receipt of a [home inspection](#)⁴. I've had inexperienced agents refuse to give sellers a copy of the home inspection until after the request for repairs was agreed upon; however, that's like putting the cart before the horse. Besides, sellers will be more agreeable to making repairs if they see other deficiencies on the report that a buyer didn't request.
- Every buyer should hire an independent and qualified home inspector to conduct a home inspection before [buying a home](#)⁵. Not every state certifies inspectors, but most reputable inspectors will belong to a trade association. Ask for those credentials.
- Don't ask your cousin or a friend to do this for you. There is little recourse available if your cousin or friend misses defects, plus a seller won't accept your friend's opinion.

Older Plumbing and Wiring

• Ungrounded Electrical.

Homes built before 1960 often have [ungrounded wiring](#)⁶ and polarized receptacles. These are two-plug outlets. You cannot change out a two-prong for a three-prong outlet without grounding the receptacle or installing a [GFCI](#)⁷. Check your city code requirements.

While there is nothing bad about ungrounded wiring, it's not a good idea to plug in sensitive electronic equipment such as computers or televisions to an ungrounded outlet, much less appliances that draw a lot of power such as microwaves or newer refrigerators. Many homeowners run [Romex](#)⁸ from the electrical box to new receptacles for these items.

While some sellers will agree to rewire the house, the majority of them will adamantly refuse. If you do not want to buy a house with ungrounded wiring, do yourself a favor and look at [newer homes](#)⁹.

• Galvanized Water Pipes

Most homes built before 1970 have [galvanized steel pipes](#)¹⁰. Over time, minerals in the water supply can cause a build up inside the pipes. If you see low-water pressure, build up could be your problem. Galvanized pipes can also rust and leak.

Many home owners do not replace galvanized pipes but repair them when they leak. It is not unreasonable to ask a seller to repair a leaking galvanized pipe. Few sellers will replace all galvanized pipes with copper, CVPC or Pex.

• Orangeburg Sewer Pipes

Ask your agent if other homes in the neighborhood have had [Orangeburg](#)¹¹ or "tar paper" sewer pipes. You can hire plumbing specialists to insert a camera down the sewer line to look for tree roots or find out if the sewer line is Orangeburg. If so, these types of pipes last about 50 years before they disintegrate. Ask for a [sewer inspection](#)¹². Replacement of sewer lines is expensive, but it's an item many sellers will replace.

Roofing

Sellers will often provide a [roof certification](#)¹³ for the buyer, which is issued by a roofing company. If the roofing company recommends repairs, the certificate will not be issued until the repairs are made. Sometimes sellers will offer a cash credit for a new roof, if it needs to be replaced. Many home inspectors do not inspect roofs.

HVAC Systems / Water Heaters

Age is a good indicator for determining when heating and cooling systems need to be replaced. Check with city code enforcers to find out if you will need a permit and today's standards requirements. It's not unusual for a buyer to request new systems, but it is expensive to replace. The average life expectancy of a furnace is about 20 years, and 10 years for a water heater.

Cash Credit or Repair

Sometimes buyers are better off asking for a cash credit on a repair item instead of asking the seller to replace or repair. The seller has no vested interest in the home once it is sold, and might not hire the most qualified contractor or do the repair in a manner that is satisfactory to a buyer. Before asking for a cash credit, check with your lender to determine if a cash credit is allowed.

Closing Tips

Above all, unless the home is brand new, do not nitpick small items. Address major issues and safety issues. Do not make repair requests for items that could have been readily ascertained on your initial inspection such as cracked sidewalks, bad paint jobs or uneven floors. Otherwise, the seller will feel you should have asked for those items in the [purchase offer](#)¹⁴.

Smart buyers will ask the seller to pay for a [home warranty](#)¹⁵. Home warranties cover major defects for a year and provide a buyer with peace of mind.

In closing, if the home has foundation problems or a [wet basement](#)¹⁶, you might want to think twice about pursuing a purchase on this type of home.

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