

JULY 2024



REPORTER

Inspection News and Views from the American Society of Home Inspectors, Inc.

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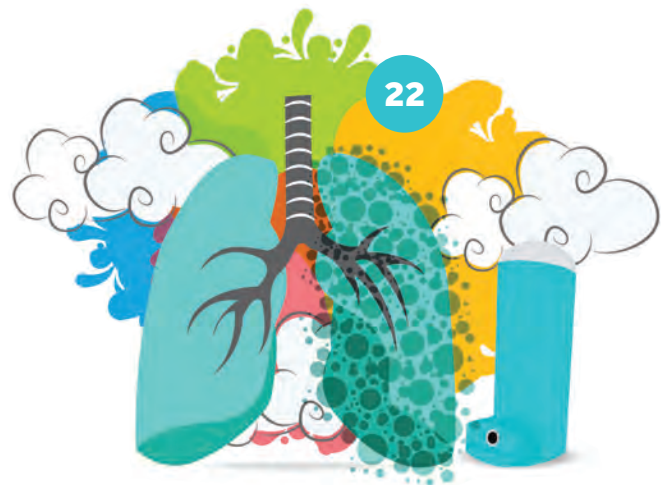
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OUR MISSION To set and promote standards for property inspections and to provide the educational programs needed to achieve excellence in the profession and to meet the needs of our members.

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ASHI REPORTER – ISSN 1076-1942 – the official publication of the American Society of Home Inspectors, Inc. (ASHI), 932 Lee St., Suite 101, Des Plaines IL 60016, is published monthly. Periodical postage paid at Des Plaines, IL 60016 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ASHI Reporter, 932 Lee Street, Suite 101, Des Plaines, IL 60016-6546.

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Checking In

An update from ASHI's executive director

BY JAMES THOMAS

It's hard to believe that we are halfway through 2024. This year has been one to remember, and there's still more on the way. As a nation, we are focusing on an upcoming presidential election, fed rate hikes or cuts, and lawsuits that will continue to impact the more significant industry and, by relationship, the profession of home inspection. For many of our home inspectors, this has been one of the most challenging times in recent years.

We at ASHI recognize the ever-changing landscape of home inspection and thank you for continuing to be a part of ASHI. This past year has helped us appreciate you even more as you continue to invest in ASHI, even though it may be harder than in years past. We are investing back into ASHI this year to help us improve your member experience and help you become the best service provider you can be for your community.

Exciting Updates

ASHI has undergone the rigorous renewal process required by the NCCA and received another five-year approval for the **ASHI Certified Inspector Certification**. As a reminder, ASHI is the only home inspector organization in North America that offers a valid third-party accredited certification. For all those who have earned this designation, this accreditation validates your experience and expertise as a home inspector. It is something to be proud of having accomplished.

ASHI is in the process of moving from a proprietary database and website to a more robust system. The ASHI staff team will complete this project later this year. On the member's end, tracking **Continuing Education credits** will become more straightforward; the **renewal process** will be much more manageable,

and an **easier-to-navigate website** will enhance your experience. A redesigned **Find An Inspector Tool** will make it easier for consumers to find ASHI members in their area and enable a fair approach to seeing the results displayed.

ASHI's Board and Committees have been working hard on your behalf. Thank you to all for participating in the **latest ballot**. When writing this article, we did not know the results, but I appreciate the work put into continuing to improve our governance. I'm hoping that everyone made their voice heard. Similarly, the Standard Committee and the ASHI Board diligently studied and worked on **possible updates to the ASHI's Standard of Practice**. You are invited to actively participate during the public comment period and when this issue goes to vote.

We were excited to have done the **ASHI Virtual Summit** early this year for those who couldn't attend some in-person events. We also have **two more InspectionWorld on the Road opportunities** if you didn't get to attend the one in Ohio, and even if you did, I would encourage you to check out the two hosted by St. Louis and New England in September. These events have a fantastic slate of speakers and will take place in beautiful venues. You will be able to network with like-minded professionals and learn great information while you're at it.

Also, the **ASHI Edge** allows our members to learn from anywhere at any time. All the courses on this platform are available to members at no additional charge. Currently, we have more than 350 hours of ASHI CE available, and there are more than 140 courses available to take right now. The ASHI education team already has approval for courses in 30 licensed states and other courses with ICC

approval. We are constantly working on adding new courses and receiving more approvals. If you still need to log onto the ASHI Edge or have yet to take a course, please take the time to familiarize yourself with it today. ASHI's monthly webinars are also recorded and put on the site to help educate those who couldn't make it when it was live.

As always, I encourage everyone who still needs to participate in the **ASHI Advantage Insurance program** powered by InspectorPro to look into this immediately. This unique program offers value not found anywhere else in the open market. The June Reporter highlighted all the ASHI affiliates, many of whom had unique offers only for ASHI members. We are continuing to work on collaborating with others to continue to empower you and your businesses.

As a word of encouragement to close out this article, remember that despite everything you cannot control in the current environment, ASHI members

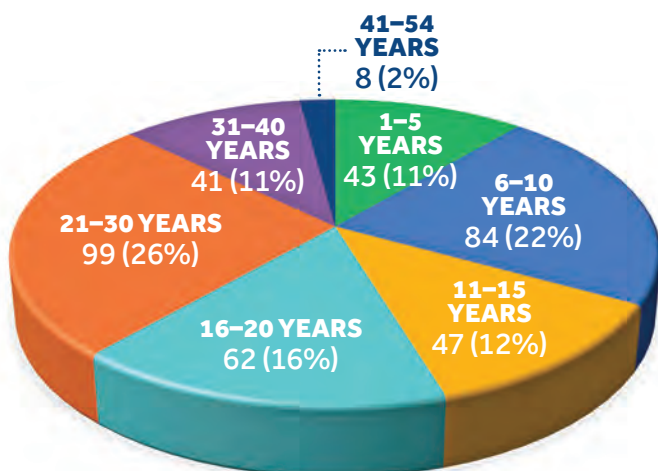
ASHI is the only home inspector organization in North America that offers a valid third-party accredited certification. For all those who have earned this designation, this accreditation validates your experience and expertise as a home inspector. It is something to be proud of having accomplished.

do their best with the things in their control—which is continuing to care for your clients and focus on improving your knowledge and skills to become even better at that. 🌐

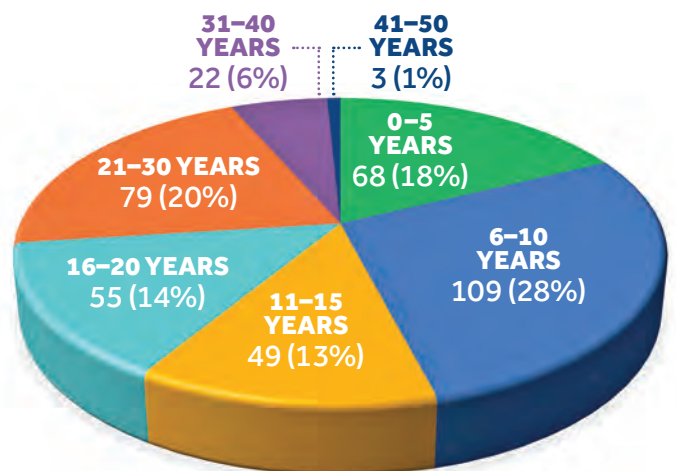
Correction

In the June issue of the *Reporter*, a question was inadvertently repeated. Here are the correct questions and answers.

Q1: How many years have you been working as a home inspector? (Answered 386; Skipped 0)



Q3: How many years have you been an ASHI member? (Answered 386; Skipped 0)



Celebrating ASHI Staff

Recognizing ASHI's own Edwin Barrera and Alicia McCray

BY LAURA ROTE



EDWIN BARRERA
ASHI Director of Education
and Curriculum Development



ALICIA MCCRAY
Financial Services Administrator/QB Expert

President's
Staff Award
2023

The ASHI 2023 President's Staff Award had two deserving recipients this year—Edwin Barrera and Alicia McCray.

Established in 1989, the President's Award is presented by the outgoing ASHI President in recognition of outstanding service to the association.

Both Barrera and McCray have been part of the ASHI team for more than three years, contributing their talents in a myriad of ways, from their professionalism to their positivity.

We recently got to know both Barrera and McCray a little bit more, including what they love about their work and how they unwind beyond 9-to-5.



MEET EDWIN BARRERA

Barrera is the director of education and curriculum development at ASHI. He oversees all ASHI Education, including pre-license and continuing education for classroom, online and InspectionWorld, state and association approvals, and reviewing ASHI continuing education requests and submissions.

How long have you been with ASHI?

I have been with ASHI since October 2020, but I will say it doesn't feel that long. It's a great experience learning all things ASHI and helping advanced ASHI Education.

In these short 3.5 years, I have seen ASHI focus on bringing ASHI into the 21st century, from education to a new database and even a website. I have seen the ASHI board and staff working together to accomplish projects and initiatives focused on providing members with even more benefits.

Have you always done this kind of work?

I have always been involved in education; I started as a teacher and taught for over 17 years. Sometime after about eight years of teaching, I also began training teachers and directors and added talent development to my skills and soon after became a

director of training and development. I have managed educational programs with teams of educators in a couple of organizations. I developed a virtual training program for teachers/educators from all over the world in preparation to teach in the US. I also created educational content for online classes and developed virtual Instructor-led classes.

What have you learned from this role?

This is my first time working for a nonprofit. Most of my experience has been with for-profit educational institutions, and they are certainly run a bit differently. I have learned that when you put a group of people in charge of an organization, you really see how much they care about the organization. You see their desire to succeed as an organization and provide ongoing benefits to members. You also see there are great discussions, compromise, and backing when a particular initiative is finally selected to move forward. I have also learned that this process takes time, which can delay starting projects, but knowing these strategic goals are coming from ASHI leadership ensures we can effectively start and complete projects that will benefit the association and members.

What has ASHI taught you?

ASHI has taught me there are people out there who are passionate about the home inspection industry, from our board of directors to our committee members and even our members. They all care about the profession, ASHI, and each other. When I hear a friend or someone looking to purchase a home, I make sure to tell them to get a home inspection so they are not surprised by issues, and I tell them that their home inspector is looking out for them and their safety. I also tell them they need an ASHI member because of the ASHI Standard of Practice and Code of Ethics they are required to follow. I am always thrilled to tell anyone that our members are dedicated to continuing education by committing to completing some of the highest continuing education requirements on a yearly basis.

How is home inspector education evolving?

You may have seen some of ASHI's new interactive online courses, which I am excited we were able

to bring to our members. We are thrilled to bring these interactive courses, which involve activities and engagement throughout the course. There is nothing wrong with watching videos, especially when the video contains great content, but adding exercises, engagement, and application of what they are learning is the idea behind one main adult learning practice to ensure the information begins to be stored in a part of the brain that makes it easier to recall. I am excited to work with some of our instructors on future virtual instructor-led classes where we implement these practices to those courses.

Tell us more about you.

I was born and raised in Chicago. I have lived in all the main parts of the city, the north side, west side, near downtown, and finally purchased my building in the near southwest side of the city.

When not in Chicago, we travel to Mexico and Colombia to visit family. I live with my wife, Janeth, and two wonderful kids, Luna, 9 years old (going on 19!), and Samuel, my 14-year-old who already seems like an old soul. I enjoy spending time with them on my hikes and trips. Luna loves working with me around the house and even has her own set of tools, and Samuel and I tend to just hang around and talk, play video games together, and watch movies.

What else do you like to do for fun?

I like to travel and spend time outdoors hiking, camping, or visiting small towns. I do spend a lot of time doing Bonsai—the Japanese art form that involves small trees in a pot. I spent several weeks a year, for four years, studying with an American Bonsai master at his Bonsai Nursery near Portland, Oregon.

Any other fun facts?

In my 20s, I practiced a Brazilian martial art called capoeira, which has a very interesting history and is considered a fighting dance because of the music and acrobatics involved when sparring with another student. I performed with the capoeira group all over Chicago for several years, and I even practiced and performed in Mexico and Spain.

Were you surprised to win this award?

Yes, I didn't expect it at all. I am the kind of person who wants to see projects completed successfully and effectively because it's the right thing to do. I was brought up with the idea that if you are going to do something, anything, to do it to the best of your abilities, not because someone is watching or because you will get an award or bonus. It was a nice surprise; recognition is always nice to hear or see. Our past president, Lisa Alajajian Giroux, has always been a strong supporter of our projects and initiatives, and I always felt recognized by her and the other board members.

What does this award represent to you?

The award is a reminder that all our work and efforts are greatly appreciated and noticed. A lot of work and time goes into creating educational content, and most learners only see the end product. We do hear positive and constructive feedback on the courses, classes, and events, but this is all after the content is completed. Receiving the award really shows the appreciation for the time, effort, and work that went into creating all our new educational content.

What does ASHI mean to you?

To me, ASHI means quality, excellence, pride, respect, and empowerment. I love seeing a legacy of ASHI members and families that embody this definition in their profession, from Sean Troxell on the East Coast to Rebecca Castro on the West Coast. ASHI represents a family, a community, that supports the profession of home inspection. When I think of ASHI, I think of its members, how ASHI was created to support its members, and how ASHI members support each other.

What do you love most about the team you work with?

I am happy to say there is no one thing I love the most. The ASHI team and ASHI leadership bring a great mix of skills, support, and knowledge under one roof. We have staff focused on collaboration and supporting each other as we work on member benefit projects, and then there is leadership that provides insight into home inspector needs, member points of view, and knowledge about the industry.

I would like to thank everyone for their patience, support, and suggestions. Everything we have done at ASHI Education has been a team effort from staff, board members, educators, SMEs, and ASHI members. I look forward to continuing to build more value with everyone's help and guidance.

I would also like to call out my wife, Janeth, because without her patience and love, I probably wouldn't be where I am today. During the work week, she is the one who reminds me to step away from the computer to go for walks, eat, give some hugs to the kids, and get some exercise.



MEET ALICIA MCCRAY

McCray is ASHI's financial services administrator/QuickBooks expert. She started working for ASHI in March 2021 and lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Her career passions have always revolved around business management, systems operations, and accounting.

How have you seen ASHI evolve in your time there?

When I started, we were still doing a lot of the things the old-fashioned way, but James Thomas, our executive director, was really influential on pushing ASHI into the 21st century with our systems and procedures. In the last three years we have become a fully paperless company that operates completely online, which has improved ASHI's ability to function anywhere, anytime.

What has this role taught you?

I don't think you could fit everything I have learned working with Tim Buell (retired ACI and financial services director) in an entire issue of the ASHI Reporter, let alone one article. But I can tell you the most important thing I have learned under Tim's guidance is to ask questions. You don't know what you don't know, and it never hurts to ask questions.

What has ASHI taught you?

Patience. Rome wasn't built in a day, and it takes a lot of time, effort, and work to revitalize a long-standing industry to make it accessible for the next generation. If you don't have patience, it's easy to get frustrated with the process.

What do you do when you're not at work?

I have four kids and a full-time job, so I don't have a lot of free time, but my family enjoys camping and swimming, and we do a lot of cross-country road trips since my husband's family is based in Illinois.

What does this award mean to you?

I was surprised to win this award because I assumed there was only one, and it was going to Edwin Barrera because he has been nothing short of amazing since he joined ASHI in 2020. I have always had a collaborative working relationship based on mutual respect with our past president Lisa Alajajian Giroux, as I started working with ASHI when she was the treasurer, so I was not surprised when she acknowledged that because that is the type of person Lisa is. It's easy to produce quality work when you have great leadership, so my award is really for the financial services department as a whole and not just for me personally. Still, it meant a lot to me. It's always nice to be acknowledged for your hard work.

What does ASHI mean to you?

ASHI means community to me, because that's what this organization stands for. We help each other, we answer each other's questions, and we bounce ideas off each other. It's a collaborative effort.

What do you love most about the team you work with?

They ask for help when they need it, and everyone is invited to share their ideas for the good of ASHI. I think it's important that everyone is heard because no one knows how to improve the process of a task like the person who is actually in the trenches completing that task. While it is important to have direction from leadership, it's also important for leadership to hear from their employees.

I have truly enjoyed these last three years working with ASHI as we improve our culture and systems to better serve our membership, and I look forward to all the crazy things in store for ASHI over the next year. 🌟

How Do Home Inspectors Find Work?

Tips for marketing, finding work, and managing risk

BY ALYSSA CINK, MARKETING CONTENT EDITOR, INSPECTORPRO INSURANCE

When navigating how to get work as a home inspector, sometimes the simplest methods generate the best home inspection leads.

In 2023, Philip Dancer of Dancer & Company Inspections of the D.C., Maryland, Virginia (DMV) area was shopping with his family when he received a surprising email. It was from a stranger and was so out of left field, Dancer assumed it was spam. Looking back, he knows it wasn't spam, but rather a testament to his excellent marketing.

Who emailed him? The assistant of a famous singer who wanted Dancer to perform a next-day inspection so they could fly in from out of state. Also, since the singer had performed for US presidents, a secret service agent would travel along to verify they could secure the grounds for future performances. The property, which has become a public listing since Dancer's inspection, is now going for almost \$12 million.

If the client's real estate agent was from out of state, how did they find Dancer? Dancer said the North Carolina real estate agent called into his contacts in the DMV area asking for inspectors who dealt with high-end clients, and who were highly responsive, would make the entire process turnkey, and put out good vibes to take care of this client.

Dancer was just the inspector they were looking for. The opportunity fell into his lap because he'd marketed himself as everything the real estate agent needed. His reputation preceded him—which is exactly how to get work as a home inspector.

Why is marketing valuable for home inspection lead generation?

Many new inspectors wondering how to get into home inspections also want to know: Is it hard to find work as a home inspector? It depends on your local demand for inspections, the services you offer, and how you market yourself.



Alyssa Cink is the Marketing Content Editor for InspectorPro Insurance, which offers ASHI members exclusive benefits through its program: InspectorPro with the ASHI Advantage. Through risk management articles in the ASHI Reporter and on the InspectorPro website, InspectorPro helps inspectors protect their livelihood and avoid unnecessary risk. Get peace of mind and better protection with InspectorPro's pre-claims assistance and straightforward coverage. Learn more at inspectorproinsurance.com/ashi-advantage.



The Managing Risk column with InspectorPro Insurance provides home inspectors with tips to protect their businesses against insurance claims, craft effective pre-inspection agreements, offer additional inspection services, and use new tools and equipment.

Working in a service industry such as this, inspectors cannot overlook the role of marketing in how to get work as a home inspector. Marketing can open up plenty of home inspection leads, and 2024 ASHI President Mark Goodman of BPG Inspections in Missouri and Dancer agree. But some inspectors don't see the value.

"Most inspectors don't want to market. They don't like to do it. They don't understand they should be doing it all the time," Goodman said. "If you're not marketing, you are not going to get much business unless you've just been in the business so long that everybody knows you."

"I would probably say 80% of what's going to determine your ability to succeed in this career is all marketing," Dancer said. "A very small portion of it is actually technical competency based."

Strategic marketing ultimately boosts your reputation, sales, and growth, explains Kristy Snyder in her *Forbes* article, "What is Marketing?" It's all about visibility and building relationships, Goodman said.

"If I do a better job of marketing than the other guys, I'm going to come out with a bigger market share ... because I'm visible. And if you're not visible, you're invisible," he said.

How do home inspectors find work through marketing?

How do home inspectors find work through relationships and marketing? They look at who hires home inspectors—typically real estate agents, buyers, and sellers. Although the buyers and sellers are your actual clients in most cases, they often find you through their real estate agents. Connecting with all three is invaluable to expanding your home inspection lead generation.

Every inspector has a list of tactics for creating these connections. For example, many suggest dropping off marketing materials, sponsoring broker lunches, and giving in-person presentations. You can find lots of resources online, like A House on a Rock Home Inspections' article "3 Home Inspection Marketing Tips" and our guide to marketing to real estate agents at inspectorproinsurance.com.

At InspectorPro, however, we encourage

inspectors to be proactive—both in managing their risk and finding work. To support an ever-growing inspection business, we've combined home inspectors' advice for finding work with our own risk management advice. Here are four things to try and four things to avoid.

4 THINGS TO TRY

1 Provide the kind of service people talk about.

Dancer's experience proves that stellar service gets people talking.

As a former career banker, Dancer entered the inspection field at the height of Covid without any contacts or prior experience. But his previous banking career taught him to stand out and how to get experience as a home inspector, despite being in different industries. The key, he says, is going beyond the service your client expects from you.

"Once you get past the initial startup phase, and you have somewhat of a presence in your local area, everyone's going to be confident. So how do you separate yourself? How do you charge more for your services?" Dancer said. "Ultimately, what we arrived at was you have to provide a level of service that is so overwhelming that people will make this comment, 'I can't believe that you don't charge more for this.'"

Dancer finds this useful in work as a home inspector, too. He describes his inspection service as "immersive" and "turnkey." For example, with pre-drywall inspections, Dancer shows the site supervisor where defects are and personally walks them through the report. It's one less job for his clients, it reduces confusion and complaints for Dancer, and it sparks word of mouth.

"The word spreads in that new construction community that this is the person you need to go to

because he will make the process very seamless. You don't have to lift a finger," he said.

Example: Maximize your home inspection leads and opportunities by making yourself available.

Clients and real estate agents want inspectors who make themselves available throughout your

"Most inspectors don't want to market. They don't like to do it. They don't understand they should be doing it all the time. If you're not marketing, you are not going to get much business unless you've just been in the business so long that everybody knows you."

— 2024 ASHI President Mark Goodman

relationship with them. Justin Jarquin of the Jarquin Pillar To Post Team and Dancer have both found this to be true for how to get work as a home inspector.

"This is where we set ourselves apart from other home inspectors," Jarquin said, noting that their big sales pitch is being available 24/7. "We offer a relationship for the next five years with our clients so they're able to enjoy being homeowners." He said they have real estate agents who recommend them solely because they know that if something happens six months later, the Jarquin Pillar To Post Team will be there to support them.

Similarly, after working with private banking clients who expect it, Dancer formed a habit of quickly calling or texting back. Inspection clients have responded well to this, too.

"It's just something that carried over. Nine times out of 10, I'm holding my phone. That's one of the reasons why I think we grew so quickly," Dancer said. "The clients expect the same type of experience regardless of the industry."

2 Go beyond technical competency.

Many new inspectors rely on their technical talents to stand out. Inspectors like Dancer, however, argue that how to get experience as a home inspector depends on something else.

"It's your ability to connect with people personally. Get them to like you and trust you. That's what's going to get your first job, your second job, your third job," Dancer said. Then, retain the real estate agent you just met. "At the end of the day, this is a people business. This is a service business. And people go to you because they like you and they trust you."

As a certified master inspector, Dancer has given his fair share of presentations to real estate agents. The way they remember him for future inspection opportunities has little to do with the content of the presentation. It has almost everything to do with his ability to earn their trust, how he makes them feel, and how he's likely to treat their clients, he said.

This isn't to say your technical competency doesn't matter. But don't downplay the value of your people skills in how to get work as a home inspector. Market and present yourself as a valuable and trustable person first, Dancer said. In turn, you'll get gentle soft sales that keep agents coming.

3 Set measurable goals for the long haul.

Earning trust is a long game. Think of it like dieting; quick fixes don't produce sustainable results. The higher quality the real estate agent relationship, the longer it takes to earn their trust. It takes time, Dancer said. So be patient. Don't lose steam.

When Dancer first started inspecting, he got most of his business by researching local real estate agents and following them on social media. Over time, the brokers followed him back. This exposed more and more real estate agents to his content—mostly stuff about his personal life but also technical inspection content. Slowly but surely, his audience started to feel like they knew him personally. By becoming a familiar face, he became top of mind, Dancer said.

This paid off tremendously in his journey to more home inspection leads and clients. But it can be discouraging for newer inspectors who are eager to

hit the ground running. They're looking for instant gratification, like getting a direct message response right away. Instead, create measurable goals that set you up for the long haul, Dancer advised.

"What you should be measuring is, how many people did you get to follow you today? How many people did you follow? Were you able to make one 30-second clip a day, every single day this week? Those things are the things that should be measured," Dancer said.

What if you work for multi-inspector companies that hire home inspectors? How do home inspectors find work when it's time to go solo? Take control of your own marketing, Goodman said. Create meaningful, long-term connections. Otherwise, you'll have to build a brand-new reputation and following if you move or start your own business later.

4 Get reviews. If you're wondering how to get work as a home inspector, pay attention to your business reviews, Dancer suggested. Clients who solicit inspections without an agent are going to search for your business online. In Dancer's experience, the volume of positive reviews translates to more social credibility.

"As soon as I hit roughly 70 reviews on Google, the phones started ringing constantly. It's different from person to person. But because I knew the end goal was to make that phone ring, and because I didn't know what number I needed to hit in order to make that phone ring, the goal was to get reviews quickly," Dancer said.

How can you increase the chances of people leaving reviews? Time it wisely, Dancer advises. For example, as a family man himself, he knows most people have downtime when their kids are in bed and they're winding down. He uses this window to check in.



For help responding to negative online reviews against your home inspection business, read our article at inspectorproinsurance.com.

4 THINGS TO AVOID

Both for risk and business management, here are five things not to do while exploring how to get work as a home inspector.

1 Don't advertise your insurance coverage. Some inspectors worry about insurance making them a target. That's generally not the case—unless you advertise it.

Outside of franchises, associations, state licensing boards, and other select exceptions, you shouldn't need to disclose your insurance for home inspection lead generation or work opportunities. Keep your insurance information away from your marketing materials, and don't advertise it.

In fact, if someone shows unusual interest in your insurance, take pause. It could indicate unsavory intentions, and therefore a relationship not worth pursuing. Our blog article on why inspectors walk away from clients and real estate agents explores this in more detail at inspectorproinsurance.com.

2 Don't feel locked into agent relationships. Real estate agents are valuable connections for home inspection lead generation. Lots of home buyers and sellers will find you through real estate agents, and in many cases, you'll continue working closely with them through the inspection. How to get work as a home inspector means cultivating these relationships carefully.

That being said, don't be afraid to let go of agent relationships that no longer suit you, Jarquin said. This is especially true if you notice real estate agent red flags, like pushback against your pre-inspection agreement or showing more concern for the sale than the buyer's well-being. Jarquin said don't be afraid to let agents like that go. He said that's the adult part of the job—setting a boundary if an agent can get fairly emotional and isn't a good teammate. If they cross a line and start using an inspector in ways that feel unjust, it's not worth it, he said. "They're going to hurt your business in the long run."

3 Don't share reports with agents.

To secure future inspections and relationships, you might feel pressured to share clients' inspection reports with agents. Though reports may seem like marketing materials, remember each home inspection report is your client's property, not the property of the real estate agent. If an agent shares your report with someone else, they may assume your outdated findings are up-to-date and blame you if things go sideways.

The more inspections you perform in a day, the less time you have for building relationships, avoiding inspection or report writing errors, and other aspects of the job.

We navigate liability FAQs for real estate agent and home inspector teams in a dedicated article on inspectorproinsurance.com.



4 Don't push your volume.

In today's market, many newcomers struggle with how to get experience as a home inspector. This leaves them rushing to fit too many underpriced inspections into a single day.

Always saying yes may seem beneficial for marketing, but in reality, the more inspections you perform in a day, the less time you have for building relationships, avoiding inspection or report writing errors, and other aspects of the job. How do home inspectors find work without making time for these things?

Inspectors like Dancer intentionally schedule only one or two appointments a day. It allows him to prioritize quality inspections and relationships more thoughtfully and sustainably, while maintaining fair home inspector pricing.

"You're not going to have as many inspections. You're going to have to be very, very, very good at communicating why you are good at what you do," Dancer said. "But the tradeoff is, you're not running around with your head cut off, and you're also earning what you're worth. And the most important one is, you are now creating a consistent pipeline of business that, if you give it enough time, does not require your consistent attention to marketing." At some point, he said the client portfolio will be so large that the inspector gets referrals every day without having to market again. "My clients market for me," Dancer said.

Furthermore, don't try to get home inspection lead generation or clients by promising services or resources you don't have, Jarquin said. Don't overplay your hand; this is not how to get work as a home inspector sustainably. Instead, if you don't offer everything a real estate agent needs, have a list of vendors you can refer to. The agents will appreciate your honesty and preparation.

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Exploring the Lungs of the Home

Indoor air quality challenges for home inspectors

BY BARRY MANKIN, ACI



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With all of the recent buzz around indoor air quality issues, let's talk about what we refer to as the lungs of the home—the HVAC system. HVAC can be a wild card in the indoor air quality industry, especially as it relates to the residential side. Unlike commercial buildings that have high-end ventilation systems for high traffic, pressurization, and a myriad of different influences that have to be managed, residential air quality issues are often overlooked, despite often having simple solutions. The pain points we typically find are usually when someone is sick or scared of mold in their own home.

As home inspectors, we have a limited scope of what we actually see. Typically, we refer to the experts to take on that liability beyond our visual inspection. Our approach to our business model is a bit different than most, and I would like to offer some suggestions to help people reach better air quality related to HVAC.

Tips for Inspecting HVAC

During home inspections, our inspectors are trained to visually assess the HVAC system, including inspecting the filters, the inside of the return, and inside a representative number of supply vents. This is a simple thing to do that does not take much

time. If someone's ducts are dirty, we mention it as a maintenance item for improvement. It's such a simple thing but can pay huge dividends for the health of future inhabitants.

Let's talk filters. Other than filters not being changed regularly, they are usually too restrictive. Allow me to explain: Here in the South, the main job of air conditioning in summer is to pull moisture out of the air because, due to our high relative humidity, we're mostly managing moisture. As it relates to indoor air quality and mold—the "M word" nobody wants to mention—mold needs food and water to grow, just like humans.

Restricting air flow by design can elevate indoor relative humidity and allow vulnerable areas to achieve dewpoint. Condensation can be tricky, and dewpoint of surfaces also comes into play around registers with a lack of insulation from non-controlled spaces and areas not being sealed as well. Leaky or compromised ductwork, filters that are too restrictive—like an allergen or HEPA style filter system—undersized ducts, layout issues, combustion air makeup, improperly sized tonnage, or debris can all cause issues.

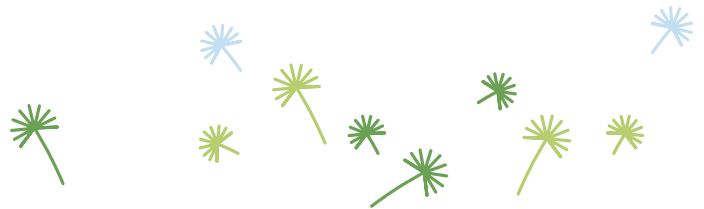
If properly designed, the two simplest things that can cause condensation is debris and filter restriction. This can lead to inefficiency and condensation, which leads to moisture leaks on all types of surfaces, again leading to the dreaded "M word." We recommend ductwork cleaning and sanitization on most homes we see because most homeowners are not proactive, and builders do not clean "food sources" like drywall dust and construction debris before they sell a new home. Most systems have been running, drawing debris in, and the coils become grounds for mold, again with the food and water located right where the airflow blows against it to spread it throughout the home.

4 Steps for Cleaning Ductwork

Now let's talk about the cleaning process. There are four stages of ductwork cleaning that all ductwork cleaning companies should do. Missing one of these four components loses the integrity of the process, and in many cases can create more significant health issues.



Barry Mankin is a licensed home inspector in Nashville. He entered the home inspection and environmental testing industry after 25 years in home construction and maintenance. Today, Mankin serves as president and owner of 4 Corners Home Inspections, 4 Corners Environmental, and 3 in 1 Duct Cleaning, serving Middle Tennessee.



1. Whether flex or metal ductwork, there may be debris on walls throughout. The coils and interior of the unit should be thoroughly examined for cleaning, and any interior insulation that is compromised with mold should be removed. Most manufacturers are now suggesting wrapping the outsides of the plenum with insulation, as opposed to the interior, for this very reason. The insulation absorbs condensation and debris, which grows mold.
2. Validating the integrity of the system and the cleaning process with a camera should always be performed. Many companies do not clean the main lines or returns all the way through. This must be done along with the validation. If the main lines are not cleaned, the rest of the system gets contaminated after the process is complete.
3. If the coils aren't cleaned, the rest of the system is contaminated in the same manner.
4. Sanitize with an antimicrobial. This can be implemented by a fogging process or a light spray. We always recommend green products for this application.

This process is not always an apples to apples comparison when looking for reputable companies to recommend to your customers. They must perform all four of these steps to be comprehensive—and to truly be clean.

Other Considerations

You may also see glowing lights coming out of a UV probe. These probes should be installed underneath the coil; it is advantageous to help keep the coil clean. Note that it does not put magic pixie dust in the air and clean the indoor air or all the debris that is still in the system. Many people may claim this, but it is simply not true. There are several other types of systems that are more involved and go through different areas throughout the ductwork. In many situations, this technology can be in locations where the light can break down filters, flex, or insulation and create particulate issues that are transferred into the interior of the home. As always, refer to an air quality expert if there are any questions in diagnosing these types of applications. HEPA filter systems, electronic filtering systems, etc. would also fall under this category for referral.

In other parts of the country, we have in-line humidifiers. Generally, again going back to mold needing food and water, if the ducts are dirty and there is an old humidification system that is not strictly maintained, there will be mold inside the ductwork, potentially blowing around the house. Here, we always recommend for those to be removed and the ductwork to be cleaned and sanitized. If this house is large enough to warrant this type of application, we recommend a steam system that

is strictly maintained on an annual basis. Most people don't even know what they are, and they all leak or have leaked in the past. They are very beneficial, but again, would require annual maintenance for the integrity of that system as long as the system is clean.

Lastly, due to the tightness of today's homes for energy efficiency standards, combustion, or fresh air makeup, is the other wild card. Builders are not required to have complex ventilation systems like in commercial buildings; however, I believe positive pressure systems will be needed in the future for all residential homes. There are simple ways to do this with filtering and a dehumidifier application while mixing the air. With that said, code-compliant

combustion air makeup is usually unfiltered air from the outside tied directly into the HVAC system.

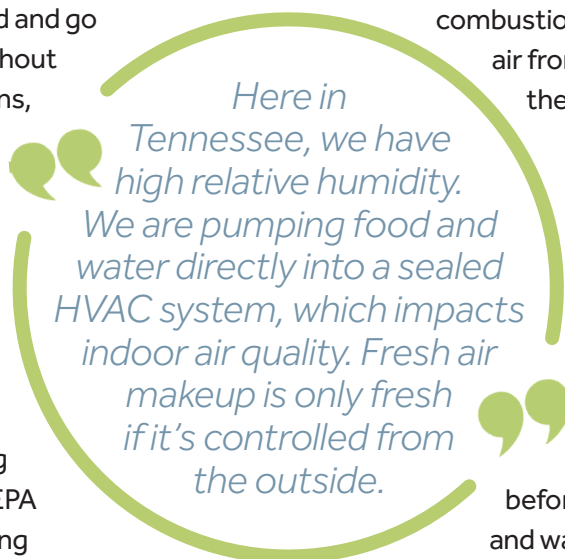
Some will have controls from vent hoods to activate that, but that only checks the box for oxygen. It does not help the air quality at all.

Here in Tennessee, not only do we have pollen, mold, bugs, and so forth, but we also have high relative humidity, as stated before. Now we are pumping food and water directly into a sealed HVAC system, which, again, impacts indoor air

quality. Fresh air makeup is only fresh if it's controlled from the outside.

Remember, many HVAC companies only address what they know for efficiency and are limited in their scope as it relates to air quality. Or they may have financial motivation to sell products to make a quick buck. This is another situation where it is best to recommend an air quality expert.

Our goal in our other businesses is to help people find balance between their energy efficiency and indoor air quality so they can have healthy homes. If the lungs are compromised in the home, then the inhabitant's lungs will be compromised as well. Unfortunately, this issue will only get worse in the residential market if we are not intentional with working to achieve that balance. 🌟



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Healthy Cooling Systems

BY JEFFREY C. MAY, RETIRED ASHI

Once compared conditions in 300 randomly selected homes I inspected as a home inspector to 600 “sick homes” I inspected as an indoor-air-quality professional; these were houses where occupants were suffering from asthma and/or allergy symptoms. About 19% of the control houses had central A/C, but 37% of the “sick homes” had central A/C—thus the sick homes were almost twice as likely to have central air conditioning.

The installation of air conditioning is the cause of sick-building symptoms in communities around the world. In my work I often find A/C coils and drip pans colonized with bacteria, yeast, and/or mold. A small portion of these biological materials becomes airborne every time the system operates. The odor (strongest at start-up) associated with contaminated systems is the stink associated with the growth of these microorganisms. Mini-splits operated in the cooling mode as well as portable and window air conditioners can also become contaminated with mold.

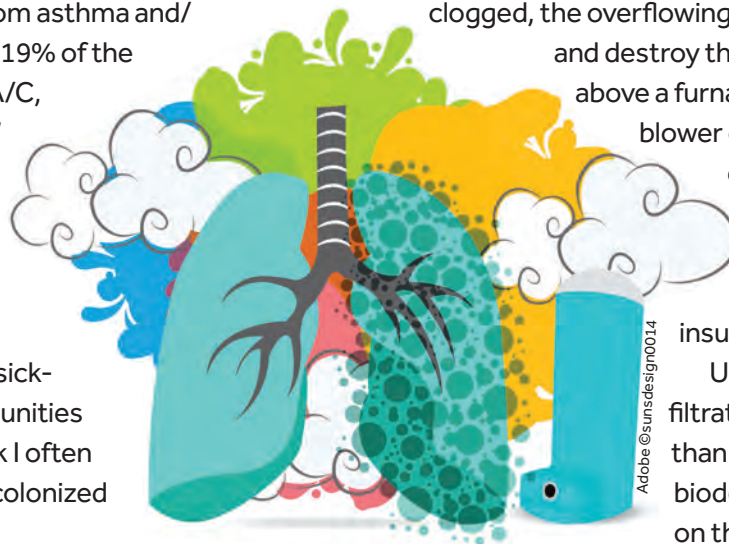
The furnace/air handler: When humid summer air is cooled on the A/C coil, the air reaches its dew point, and moisture condenses on the cooling coils

and is collected in drip pans. The water then either flows by gravity into drains or into condensate pumps that discharge the water to the exterior. If water accumulates in a drip pan when a drain line is clogged, the overflowing water can rust out and destroy the heat exchanger (if above a furnace), or drip into the blower cabinet and create damp conditions conducive to mold growth (particularly if exposed, dusty fibrous insulation is present).

Unfortunately, poor filtration is the rule rather than the exception. When biodegradable dust builds up on the cooling coil, the dust not only can block the flow of air but can also provide a substrate for biological growth as soon as the dust is dampened by condensed water. Lining material in the supply plenum (downstream

from the coil) can also get moldy from water droplets entrained in the airflow or simply from the moisture-saturated air coming off the coil.

During your inspections, you may want to note if the cooling coil is accessible for inspection and cleaning. If you don't include looking at mechanical equipment in your inspections, then you could recommend that your client have the air handler/



The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America states that 27 million people in the US have asthma, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2023 that more than a quarter of adults and children in this country have at least one allergy.

furnace inspected, especially if your client has allergies or asthma.

Here are some suggestions to offer your clients to help them keep an air handler/furnace clean:

- A/C coils and drip pans in central systems should be professionally inspected annually and cleaned as needed.
- There should never be water in the overflow pan, so during the cooling season, overflow pans should be checked, particularly if any pan is in the attic.
- The best filtration should be in place. I only recommend a pleated media filter with a MERV rating of at least at 8 (a MERV-11 for families with allergies). Electronic filters are rarely maintained as recommended. A dirty electronic filter is useless, so I always recommend substituting a MERV-11 media filter for the electrodes; most manufacturers make a media filter that will fit into the holder.
- Change the filter on the recommended schedule if not sooner, as needed.
- The filter holder should be airtight to the exterior.
- Small U-shaped UV bulbs in residential systems are useless, because the air flows too quickly by the bulbs to be disinfected adequately. In addition, UV bulbs produce ozone—an irritating gas that is a main component in smog.



Mold growth on a filter



UV bulbs are not substitutes for efficient filtration.

- Lining material should be foil-lined or closed-celled foam. If fibrous lining material is dusty and stained from water flows, it must be coated with a sealant made for the purpose or replaced because it is highly likely that the material contains or will shortly contain mold growth.
- Whenever ducts are cleaned, the furnace or air handler should be opened up and its components cleaned as needed. Sometimes the air handler will have to be dismantled for a thorough cleaning to occur.



Mold growth on the label in a blower cabinet



Moldy dust on blower blades

A/C ducts: If any ducted system was operated during construction or renovation, biodegradable dust (like sawdust) can soil the ducts. And sometimes occupants don't even know that ducts should be inspected and cleaned as needed, whether the property is newly constructed or not.

In new homes, it's tragic how often the systems are contaminated by construction dust prior to occupancy; all you have to do is remove a floor register and look into a duct with a mirror and flashlight, to see the mess.

Here are some suggestions to offer your clients to help them keep their ducts free of dust and other debris:

- Don't settle for the cheap "blow and go" duct-cleaning job.
- Ducts that have been cleaned with brushes should only then have to be cleaned every 5 to 10 years; still, they should be inspected annually and cleaned more frequently as needed.
- Coarse pre-filtering material (MERV-3) behind return grilles can protect return ducts and help keep the system clean.
- If a house has a ducted A/C system but hot water, steam, or radiant heat, supplies and returns for attic-installed A/C systems should be closed during the heating season to prevent warm, moist air from migrating up into the system. Such air can lead to condensation and mold growth in the ducts or air handler. Solid material (even cardboard) can also be installed behind ceiling return grilles to



A filthy return duct

prevent airflow from entering a return duct.

- A panned-bay return should be isolated from the basement and the rest of the floor cavity.



A panned-bay return when someone must have missed the recycling bin

Mini-splits: I am seeing more and more of these units in my investigations. They are a great way to add air conditioning in older homes that have radiator or baseboard heat. Unfortunately, though, mini-splits have inadequate filtration so inevitably become moldy, especially if they are only used in the cooling season.



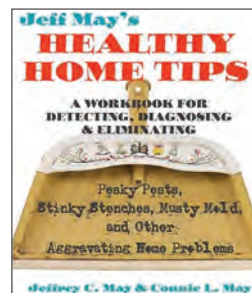
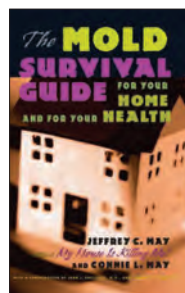
SpeedClean bib for cleaning a mini-split

One method of cleaning a mini split is to place a watertight plastic bag beneath the unit and to spray all the internal and external components with the appropriate cleaning product, and then to rinse the unit. If you are inspecting a house with one or more mini-splits, you could encourage your client to confer with an HVAC technician about cleaning options, especially if you see black spots on the louvers or in the dust on the blower blades (look carefully at the blades when stationary with a flashlight). Such spots are usually mold growth.

Window A/C units: These are not immune from biological contamination, so they should be cleaned annually at the start of the cooling season rather than at the end of the cooling season, after which such units are often stored in damp garages and basements.

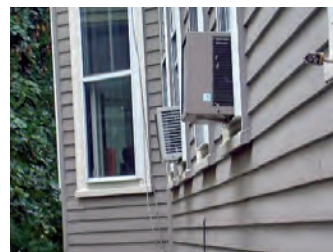


Jeffrey C. May is principal scientist at May Indoor Air Investigations and is author or co-author of five books on indoor air quality, including My House is Killing Me. He is a nationally recognized speaker on IAQ topics and is a retired member of ASHI. A Council Certified Microbial Consultant (through ACAC) and a Certified Indoor Air Quality Professional (through AEE), May was inducted into the Indoor Air Quality Association's "Hall of Fame" in 2018. He can be reached at jeff@mayindoorair.com.



Tips on cleaning window A/C units are in our books *The Mold Survival Guide: For Your Home and for Your Health*, and *Jeff May's Healthy Home Tips*, both published by The Johns Hopkins University Press and available online.

If the property you are inspecting has older wall or window air conditioners, it's probably best if your client replaces these with new units.



I wonder where the condensate from this A/C unit will flow? Hmm...

Home inspectors aren't always required to comment on indoor air quality issues; still, it seems worthwhile to give your clients information on how to maintain a healthy cooling system. And if you have concerns about the condition of such a system, recommend further evaluation. 🌟

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What's Your Difference?

Discovering and leveraging your professional differentiation

BY RICK RICKARDS



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Have you thought about what makes you appreciably different from other home inspectors? If you haven't, you're not alone. It's notoriously difficult to be objective about what makes you (and your home inspection services) unique in the eyes of the marketplace. Fortunately, there's a straightforward way to find out how the marketplace perceives you and your services: Ask your customers.

And when we say "customers," we mean both real estate agents and homebuyers. While the vast majority of your referrals probably come from agents, it's still important to understand how homebuyers view you and your service—if for no other reason than the fact that homebuyers provide the bulk of online reviews. You'll want to gather information from both groups.

Here are four basic ways to approach soliciting information from your real estate agent customers:

1. Ask them in person. This is the most direct path but not necessarily the one that produces the most objective results. You can do this informally—invite one of your real estate agent partners to join you for coffee or lunch and engage them in conversation about why they work with you. Dig into what they like and what could use some improvement.

You could do the same thing over the phone, but you won't be able to evaluate their body language, which tells you whether they're being sincere.

And speaking of sincerity, that's the downside with this approach; it's unlikely that anyone will be entirely truthful with you about any negative aspects of your service while they're sitting right there with you. However, since our primary purpose is to discover what you do best, it's okay to skip the criticisms and focus on the positives in this case.

2. Ask them via email. This is a similar approach to asking in-person, but a good deal less intimidating for your real estate people, as they don't need to answer any questions extemporaneously.



***Rick Rickards is president and general partner
of Easy Home Inspection Marketing,
a company that creates and implements
social media and email marketing content
specifically for home inspectors.***

***He can be reached at
rick.rickards@easyhomeinspectormarketing.com***

3. Gather a focus group. Invite a small group of real estate agent referral partners to participate in a roundtable focus group. You can secure a meeting room in a municipal center, hotel, coworking facility, restaurant, or other venue in neutral territory. Over refreshments, dive into some conversation that uncovers what your agents like about you and your service, and what they wish someone would do differently regarding inspections.

4. Secure a third party to conduct research for you. It's an undeniable part of human nature that most people will tell others things about you that they would never say to your face. You may want to find a third party who can gather information from your real estate partners and feed it back to you. If you don't want to hire someone for this, arrange a trade deal with someone you know who would like to gain the same kinds of insights about their business. They ask questions of your customers, and you ask questions of their customers—then you get together to compare notes.

Gathering information from homebuyers is less complicated than interviewing real estate agents. You already have their email addresses, so simply set up a brief survey (via [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) or similar) and email it to your homebuyer customers as soon after the home inspection as possible. Consider sweetening the deal to increase response by offering some kind of free service or other premium; getting this information is important enough to warrant the cost of the premium. Compile the resulting data and look for trends.

Once you've gathered this information, take the time to write down what you've discovered about yourself and about your inspection business. Chances are you'll find one or more common threads emerging around your strengths and weaknesses. The strengths form the basis of your differentiation, so consciously focus on your strengths and continue developing them, while you simultaneously work on mitigating any common weaknesses that were revealed.

We suggest distilling your newly discovered differentiation into a statement or two that captures the essence of what you have that nobody else does. Share it with people who are important to you. Print it out and post it somewhere where you'll be reminded of it frequently. This statement forms the basis of your personal brand.

In the process of gathering this data, it's likely you've also collected some testimonials. Whether they're from real estate agents or homebuyers, make sure they're displayed on your website and that they also find their way into your promotional materials.

The whole idea here is to make yourself memorable. And to be memorable, you need to be different, because the human brain categorizes and retains information by evaluating various attributes and taking note of comparative differences.

If your service is perceived to be the same as everyone else's, then buyers will naturally gravitate to the only attribute they can compare: Price. And that's not how you want to be evaluated.

A little time spent understanding your professional differentiation will help you build a stronger brand, which can directly enhance your bottom line. Knowing the difference makes a significant difference. 🌟

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Craig Efrusy Certified Professional Home Inspection

Andrew Seeger SAFEGUARD Building Inspections

5 YEARS

Boyce Hunt

Thomas Borradaile III Borradaile Inspection Group

Kareem Mincey Pillar To Post

Craig McBride

Keith Jones Real Estate Inspections

Dominic Ridge Nick Ridge Home Inspection

Jacob Tuka Pillar to Post

William Ansel Vail Home Inspections

Scott Polczynski Housemaster Home Inspections

Edward Monaghan Ed Monaghan Home Inspection

Tony Valles Michael Gaurnier

Tanner Harry GreyStone Inspection Services

John Quimby Full Compass Home Inspections



REPORTER

Here's a look at some of the topics we'd love to cover in upcoming issues of the Reporter. To be considered, submit your articles to editor@ashi.org within these areas before the deadlines below.

SEPTEMBER:

Inspecting Outdoor Areas
Deadline: July 15

OCTOBER:

Healthy Homes
Deadline: August 15

NOVEMBER:

Energy Efficiency
Deadline: September 16

DECEMBER:

Exteriors
Deadline: October 15



Goodbye,
old chimney.
Hello,
old pot.

Doron Bracha | Accent Home Inspection
Brookline, MA



DIY bidet
or bi-dont?

Sid Carter | Cingo Inspections
Dublin, GA



Who doesn't want
to smell old tennis
shoes when they
turn on the furnace?

Chris McDougall | Apex Home Inspection
Aromas, CA



Consistency
counts!

James Brock | Boston Home Inspectors
Boston, MA



Brian Chatfield | BPG
San Diego, CA



Stephen Tyler | STAT Home Inspections
Garnerville, NY



Paul Cummins | No Surprises Home Inspection
Alexandria, VA



Ray Mayo | Mayo Home Inspections
Brunswick, ME



Steve Brown | HomeSmart Inspections
Flemington, NJ

To submit your postcard, please send
your name, city, state, high-resolution
photos, headings and captions to:
postcards@ashi.org

By sending in your postcard(s), you are expressly granting ASHI the
right to use the postcard and your name with it in the ASHI REPORTER
and in other publications or media ASHI may select.

BECOME A LEADER!

Join the ASHI Leadership Team
and make a difference!



OPEN POSITIONS 2025 TERM

President-Elect (1)
Treasurer (1)
Secretary (1)
Board of Directors (3)
Certification Comm (2)
Nominating Comm (2)



Scan the
code or visit
bit.ly/3zU7Dzy
to learn more
and submit your
nomination.

Networking Opportunities

Joining ASHI leadership is a great way to meet and connect with other home inspectors. You'll be able to collaborate and share ideas, enhancing your skills and advancing your career.

Flexible Time Commitment

We know you're busy, so we've made participating easy. Board members meet four times yearly (reimbursed travel is sometimes required), typically on Saturday mornings, while committees meet 2-4 times yearly for 2 hours per month.

Nominate Yourself or a Colleague

As a voting member of ASHI, you can nominate yourself or a colleague for a leadership position on the Board of Directors. We're looking for dedicated individuals passionate about improving the home inspection industry.

**Elections will take place
in early Fall 2024.**

**Submission deadline:
July 31, 2024,
5 pm [Central].**