



MAY 2022

# REPORTER

INSPECTION NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HOME INSPECTORS, INC.

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REDEFINING THE  
VISUAL HOME  
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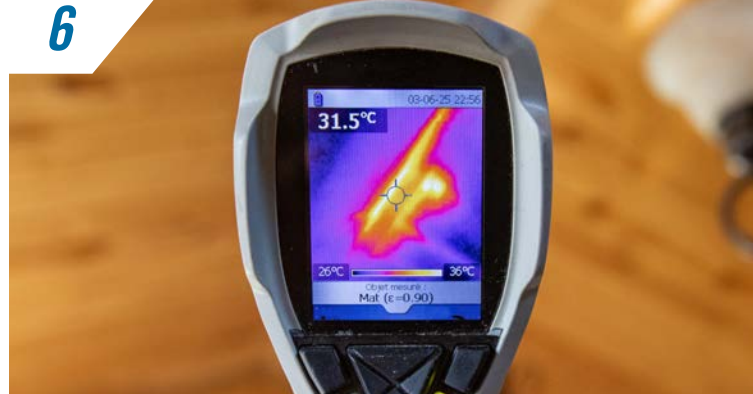
# REPORTER

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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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## Managing Risk

### INFRARED CAMERAS: REDEFINING THE VISUAL HOME INSPECTION

By Stephanie Jaynes, Marketing Director, InspectorPro Insurance



*Stephanie Jaynes is the Marketing Director 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 [www.inspectorproinsurance.com/ashi-advantage](http://www.inspectorproinsurance.com/ashi-advantage).*





**Note:** 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.

*The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of ASHI. The information contained in the article is general and readers should always independently verify for accuracy, completeness, and reliability.*

**OUR INSPECTORS WERE QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT, WHILE THERMAL IMAGING TECHNOLOGY HAS MANY BENEFITS, IT ISN'T PERFECT. THEY CAUTION OTHER INSPECTORS TO USE INFRARED CAMERAS AS FACT-FINDING TOOLS RATHER THAN DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS.**

**F**or the past two decades, home inspectors have been inspecting using thermal imaging. By examining the heat given off by various property systems and components, many inspectors have discovered roof leaks, electrical issues, structural defects, and insulation anomalies.

However, thermal imaging isn't commonplace. Due to the technology's expense and imperfections, many inspectors have opted out of purchasing infrared cameras for their businesses. For the inspectors on the fence, we explore why inspectors use thermal imaging technology—and the investments they make to do so. We also touch on important risk management considerations for anyone considering or currently offering infrared inspections.

## WHY USE THERMAL IMAGING TECHNOLOGY

When asked why they perform home inspections with infrared technology, the six home inspectors we interviewed said they began offering the service for one or more of the following reasons.

### 1. THEY WANT TO STAY COMPETITIVE IN THEIR MARKETS.

With only so many houses on the market, home inspectors need to find ways to stand out from other inspectors in their areas to be successful. One way home inspectors can get ahead of their competitors is by offering additional inspection services, like thermal imaging.

“For me, [thermal imaging] is not only a way to set myself apart as an inspector but to set our company apart,” said Michael Hammel of Guiding Light Home Inspection Services in Texas.

By offering a niche inspection service, Hammel gives his customers value that isn’t easily found elsewhere.

For other home inspectors, performing thermal imaging inspections is a matter of keeping up with the competition. Judson Faust of Liberty Inspections in Kentucky started using infrared technology after others in his market began offering the service. Now he estimates half of his potential customers call to ask about thermal imaging. That’s one big group of business Faust could have lost had he not added infrared cameras to his inspection toolbelt.

***FOR ME, [THERMAL IMAGING] IS NOT ONLY A WAY TO SET MYSELF APART AS AN INSPECTOR BUT TO SET OUR COMPANY APART,” SAID MICHAEL HAMMEL.***

Additionally, Faust says many of his referring real estate agents look for thermal imaging services before sending inspectors business. “Some REALTORS® love [infrared]. Some REALTORS® will not refer an inspector who does not use thermal imaging because they understand how important it is,” he said.

By offering infrared inspections, Faust makes sure he stays in his area’s real estate agent referral pool.

Before adding infrared technology to your home inspections to stay competitive, make sure there’s enough demand. Chuck Lambert of Sunrise Inspection Services in California invested in an infrared camera only to find that, due to the mild climate in his area, selling infrared inspections was more difficult than he’d anticipated.

Hammel, too, has seen less interest in thermal imaging than he had expected. However, he attributes this to potential clients not understanding what thermal imaging is and how it can help them. “[Clients] don’t request [thermal imaging] as often as I would like them to. I think a lot of it goes back to education and really knowing whether or not it’s something they need.”

Similarly, Matthew Cottenham of Trademark Home Inspection in Michigan believes many potential clients don’t understand the value enough to make the additional investment into thermal imaging. “It’s amazing how people will complain about their energy bills all day long but not want to spend a few hundred bucks to have someone come in and do a proper energy audit that could save them 20%. Over a lifetime that’s a lot of money,” he said.

To ensure there’s enough demand to warrant investing in thermal imaging, we recommend looking at your potential clients’ pain points and assessing how many homebuyers in your area are likely to want infrared inspections.



## 2. THEY WANT TO BETTER SPOT DEFECTS.

According to Mike Morgan of Morgan Inspection Services in Texas, the biggest benefit of using an infrared camera is providing a more thorough inspection that helps serve the client and protect the inspector. “I have found several roof leaks and even water leaking through the lower part of a wall and a couple of electrical issues I would never have found without a thermal camera,” he said. “Had I not, those problems would have persisted after my client bought the house. And who knows how big of a problem that could’ve turned into?”

Additionally, the inspectors we interviewed use infrared to assist them in finding insulation anomalies and assessing heating and cooling registers. According to Steven Rinehart of Rinehart Real Estate Inspection Service in Texas, infrared cameras can often detect such defects sooner or more accurately than the naked eye.

“It’s kind of like going to your doctor. He can use an x-ray to find things that maybe haven’t manifested themselves yet,” Rinehart said. “At least once a year I find a house where most or all of a room never got insulation in the ceiling. If you tried to visually verify it from the attic, it was almost impossible because of the architecture.”

Our inspectors were quick to point out that, while thermal imaging technology has many benefits, it isn’t perfect. They caution other inspectors to use infrared cameras as fact-finding tools rather than diagnostic tools.

“If I see spots with the thermals, I always verify with a moisture meter because a thermal camera only sees temperature differential,” Faust said.

## 3. THEY WANT TO ADD A SOURCE OF REVENUE TO THEIR BUSINESS.

Many of the inspectors we interviewed added thermal imaging inspections to their businesses to generate additional revenue. Each of them added the service in one of two ways: as a standard practice in all their basic inspections, or as an additional service that clients paid for. There are pros and cons to both approaches.

Paul Duffau of Safe@Home Inspections in Washington found that offering thermal imaging as a standard service didn’t lead to the revenue growth he’d wanted. “A mistake I made early on is that I used [thermal imaging] as a point of differentiation and didn’t charge for it. That was a mistake because it built in the expectation that I was going to use it all the time for free,” he said. “If you want to use it as an add-on service, then advertise it as an add-on service.”

Cottenham found the opposite to be true. Due to a lower demand for thermal imaging, selling home inspections using infrared technology as a separate service wasn’t profitable. “In our market, we tried to add [thermal imaging] as a separate service. The demand just wasn’t there,” Cottenham said.

“So, at this point, we just use it as an added tool for our inspectors. We do have a specialty inspection where, if someone requests it, we will go out and just do thermal scanning for them. But it’s not something we regularly practice.”

Whether inspectors increase their standard fee or sell thermal imaging as an additional service, how much inspectors charge clients when they use infrared cameras varies dramatically. Some home inspectors we interviewed charged as little as \$25 more to add thermal imaging to their standard inspection. Others charge 50 percent more than their standard inspection fee. Price points really depend on the individual inspector and their target market.

## INVESTMENTS INSPECTORS MAKE

Keep in mind that, to offer an additional service like thermal imaging, home inspectors must make several up-front investments. Common investments include the three Es: education, equipment, and endorsements.

### EDUCATION

In an article for FLIR Systems’ called “3 Costly and Embarrassing Mistakes that Novice Thermal Camera Users Make and How to Avoid Them,” home inspector Scott Harris stated that it’s common to misinterpret infrared images.

“The worst thing that can happen is to misdiagnose a problem that is or isn’t there. It could make or break a deal on a home sale or induce costly destructive measures that could prove you were wrong,” Harris said. Not all cold or hot spots are problems, and even someone with extensive building science expertise can make the wrong call without a baseline understanding of the physics behind thermal imaging and experience interpreting images.”

With interpreting images being so difficult, it’s important that inspectors interested in offering infrared technology in their home inspections obtain adequate education and certification.

“If you’re trying to use [an infrared camera] without training, you can potentially identify things incorrectly,” said Ryan Thomas of Good Neighbor Home Inspections in New York. “That’s why it’s really important to make sure that you get the necessary education so, when you’re utilizing the infrared camera, you’re identifying things accurately and correctly for your clients.”

In addition to formal training, Hammel believes that before inspectors start offering thermal imaging, they should practice on their own, friends’, and families’ homes. By practicing on multiple properties, inspectors can get used to evaluating pictures correctly.

Morgan agrees that the more experience an inspector has the better service they’ll be able to provide and the less likely they’ll be to make mistakes. “The more you use [an infrared camera], the more training you get, the less likely it is to misread the data.”

### EQUIPMENT

When Rinehart started performing home inspections with infrared technology 10 years ago, he paid nearly \$10,000 for his camera. Now, Rinehart’s inspectors use relatively inexpensive cameras that clip on to their cell phones. “You can get an infrared camera that snaps onto your phone cheaper than you can buy a decent ladder to get onto a two-story house,” he said.

Some of the most well-known thermal camera manufacturers that sell products suitable for home inspectors include FLIR Systems, Fluke, and Seek Thermal. Prices range from a few hundred dollars to around \$15,000, depending on the accessory or camera's clarity and features.

Due to the high level of competition in equipment sales, most inspectors advise seeking recommendations from others in the industry.

### ENDORSEMENTS

An endorsement is a form that either changes or adds coverage to your insurance policy. At InspectorPro, our carriers automatically cover thermal imaging under their standard policies, so an endorsement is not needed.

However, other home inspection insurance policies may exclude thermal imaging. Be sure to read your insurance policy and contact your provider if there is a thermal imaging exclusion you would like to modify with an endorsement.

### LIMITING YOUR LIABILITY

In our claims experience, using a thermal imaging camera does not appear to correlate with a higher propensity for claims. In fact, infrared technology can make for a better report and a more informed client, thus, potentially mitigating risk. However, whenever you utilize an instrument, device, or tool not specifically required by the standards of practice, you should take certain precautions to avoid assuming additional liability.

### MAKE SURE YOUR CLIENTS UNDERSTAND THE LIMITATIONS OF INFRARED.

Duffau thinks the main drawback to infrared technology is unrealistic expectations of the equipment's capabilities. To avoid misunderstandings, Duffau makes sure his clients understand the basics before he performs the service.

One basic thing Thomas tries to emphasize is how the technology actually functions. By explaining how thermal imaging works, he helps clients have reasonable expectations. "It's easy to assume that you can see through walls," Thomas said. "But you can help manage [clients'] expectations of what you're going to get out of utilizing thermography."

Cottenham also explains how conditions on the day of the inspection can impact thermal imaging's ability to spot defects. "Because it only detects temperature differences, a leak would have had to have happened within the last several hours. Because once that water reaches the same temperature as the rest of the room, [the infrared camera] is not going to show it," Cottenham said.

Hammel recommends showing clients thermal pictures in addition to standard pictures while discussing inspection findings and limitations. By showing two snapshots of the same area, inspectors can provide clients with important context.

By clearly identifying the limitations of your services, as well as the extent of your services, you mitigate your risk. Just make sure what you say out loud, in writing, and online all agree.

### BE CONSISTENT IN HOW AND WHEN YOU OFFER YOUR SERVICES.

A few years ago, a home inspector used infrared technology inconsistently in a vacant home inspection property. In doing so he identified a couple of minor issues. A month went by and a leak from a bathroom manifested. As far as the inspector could tell, the leak wasn't present during the home inspection. However, the area where the leak arose was not one the inspector had examined with his infrared camera. So his clients argued that, had he used the infrared camera in that area, he would have identified the condition.

As illustrated above, if you do decide to use an infrared camera during your inspections, you need to be consistent. If you charge for the service, make sure to offer thermal imaging to every inspection client. Additionally, we recommend having a place in your pre-inspection agreement that states that thermal imaging is available for purchase.

If you do not charge for thermal imaging services, use your camera in the same way and on every inspection. If you use your infrared camera inconsistently, or in different ways across inspections, you could get into trouble. For example, only use your camera in specific areas that have existing, visually identifiable evidence of issues. Or use it in areas that are likely to have defects made apparent by thermal imaging. Furthermore, to avoid inaccurate client expectations, explain where you do and don't use your camera in your pre-inspection agreement and your report.

### CARRY EQUIPMENT COVERAGE.

Formally known as inland marine coverage or a commercial property floater, equipment coverage insures your inspection tools and equipment. Unlike standard property insurance, inland marine coverage protects your tools and equipment regardless of their location. This is important in the home inspection industry since, rather than housing your tools and equipment in an office, you usually have your materials in your work vehicle or on inspection sites.

In most cases, equipment coverage for home inspectors reimburses you for the actual cash value (not the cost of the items new) of your stolen or damaged equipment or tools. Oftentimes, coverage extends to not just items you own but also items you lease or rent.

To learn more about inland marine coverage, read InspectorPro's article "How to protect your tools and equipment" online. Current clients can request equipment coverage by contacting their InspectorPro brokers. Prospective clients can apply for insurance via InspectorPro's online application.

### THERMAL IMAGING AND YOUR HOME INSPECTIONS

Could offering home inspections using infrared technology make you more competitive in your market? Are you looking for ways to better spot certain defects? Are you interested in additional revenue sources and job security for your inspection business? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, perhaps it's time for your company to offer thermal imaging.

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# SMART INSPECTOR SCIENCE

## METAL FLUE PIPE HOLES

**HOLES IN METAL FLUE PIPES THAT EXTEND FROM GAS APPLIANCES CAN CREATE A HAZARD. THEY MAY ALSO INDICATE SIGNIFICANT HOME PERFORMANCE ISSUES.**

### SIGNS OF CONDENSATION

The products of gas combustion should stay warm enough to flow up the chimney without condensation. Watch for signs of poor draft of gas combustion, such as condensation and rust on the metal flue pipe from the appliance to the chimney (Photo 1).



*Photo 1. Signs of Condensation*

Photo 2 shows a severely rusted flue pipe. If you look closely, you can see rust through the elbow joints and along the horizontal run. This metal pipe has failed.



*Photo 2. Rust on Flue Pipe*

### A PRIME CANDIDATE FOR RUST

Look at the gas water heater in Photo 3. A long, low-slope flue pipe extends back from the water heater, over the crawl space, and all the way to the chimney. Immediately you'll see red flags: Does the flue pipe have the proper pitch? Is the flue pipe too long for the height of the chimney? Could the chimney be blocked?



*Photo 3. Long Low-Slope Flue Pipe*

I took Photo 4 near the masonry chimney in that crawl space. Notice a dip in the slope of the flue pipe, patched with duct tape. (How often we see duct tape, "the handyman's secret weapon," at the site of a defect!) Condensation has also created rust holes and metal failure.



*Photo 4. Metal Flue with Holes, Tape*



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## **RUST AND CONDENSATION ON METAL FLUE PIPES INDICATE IMPROPER DRAFT OF COMBUSTION PRODUCTS UP THE CHIMNEY.**

For this water heater, the metal flue pipe run was too long, the slope was inadequate, and the chimney was not high enough for the horizontal run. The products of gas combustion did not flow up the chimney. Instead, these moisture-laden products cooled in the metal flue, causing water condensation on the metal.

### **RELATED ISSUES DUE TO POOR DESIGN**

Even without a complete evaluation of the chimney, flue pipe, and btu of a gas appliance, we can still understand the problem. Where combustion gases don't flow properly they cool in the flue pipe, and condensation and rust occur over time.

Illustration W006 shows related issues. In addition to a rusted flue pipe, you may see signs of backdrafting at the draft diverter and burn marks near the gas burner. A lack of combustion air or negative pressure in a home can also cause backdrafting and rust. Negative pressure may be due to a large-volume kitchen fan or even a clothes dryer in a very tight home. Oversized chimney flues are another potential source of draft issues.

### **THE TAKEAWAY**

Rust and condensation on metal flue pipes indicate improper draft of combustion products up the chimney. You should describe this as a safety defect requiring further evaluation. While these signs are readily visible to a good inspector, you don't need to identify all the potential causes.

### **Gas Water Heater with Signs of Backdrafting**

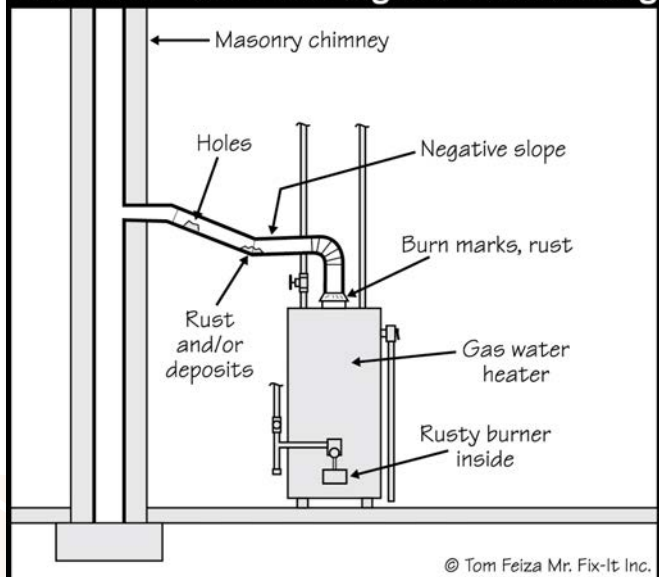


Illustration W006 Gas Water Heater with Signs of Backdrafting

*To learn more, attend Tom's technical presentations at educational sessions for ASHI chapters and local groups. Tom can also provide his knowledge for your educational event; contact him at [Tom@htoyh.com](mailto:Tom@htoyh.com).*

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# WHY DECK SAFETY SHOULD BE TOP OF MIND

By Laura Rote, Editor





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**W**ith more than 50 million residential decks in the US, it is estimated that 30 million decks are past their useful life and need to be replaced or repaired, according to the North American Deck and Railing Association (NADRA). A significant percentage of decks are missing key components, are poorly constructed, lack proper maintenance, and have significant safety issues.



"It's important that decks be inspected. Ideally, they are built right in the first place, but since in the real world they often aren't, they need to be inspected by someone who is specifically trained to do deck inspections," said Bruce A. Barker, Immediate-Past ASHI President and president of Dream Home Consultants, a Jacksonville, Florida-based consulting and building inspection firm. Barker would know. He's quite literally written the book on deck inspections. Among his many titles you'll find *A Practical Guide to Evaluating Decks and Deck Codes and Standards*. His writing over the years has included an exhaustive look at a long list of deck accidents, injuries, and fatalities. "Every single one of those was preventable," he said.

Barker said true deck inspections are not something that can be done by regular home inspectors, as additional training is critical to a thorough deck inspection. I talked to Barker more to find out what home inspectors need to consider when it comes to deck safety as part of Deck Safety Month in May.

### WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON ISSUES REGARDING DECK SAFETY?

Age is a very common issue, and the deterioration that comes with age. You get a deck that's more than maybe 15 or 20 years old and, not only has it deteriorated, but it probably wasn't built very well to begin with. It's only been since 2009 or so when the International Residential Code had more than a paragraph on decks. The code has significantly improved since then, so the earlier you go basically it was the wild west. It was left very much open to interpretation—the right way to do things.

The number one issue is flashing. Flashing protects the ledger. The vast majority of decks are supported by the house, and if the connection at the house is not properly flashed, water gets in and rots the wood. It doesn't matter how many bolts and screws you put in the rotted wood, they're not going to hold.

Then it becomes a matter of was the ledger to house connection done properly?

Then it's stairways and the rails and guards, and those are the biggies. If a deck is going to fail, it's probably going to fail at the ledger connection, at the stair connection to the deck, or the guard connections to the deck.

### ARE THERE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INSPECTING DECKS?

There's a difference between a deck inspection and a home inspection that includes a deck. When you're doing a home inspection you're looking at a gazillion things in a limited amount of time, so you really don't have the time to thoroughly inspect a deck. All you can do is look for what the standard of practice requires—obvious visible significant deficiencies, components that are not functioning properly, or components that are at the end of their service life. As for a deck inspection, there is an ASHI deck inspection standard and, according to that, there's more to be done. A deck inspection is different from and significantly more detailed than a home inspection deck inspection. To do that more detailed inspection, you need more detailed training.

I wrote a course for ASHI on the topic. It's an eight-hour online deck inspection class for members that, when you pass the exam, you get a digital badge that says you're qualified to do deck inspections. It's eight hours covering everything from flashings to ledger attachment to stairs, handrails, guards. It covers basically everything in the deck inspection standard that you need to know to inspect a deck.



***The real go-to document is DCA 6, from the American Wood Council. That's a free download from [awc.org](http://awc.org). If you build a deck to that, you've built a good deck.***

### HOW HAS DECK SAFETY EVOLVED?

The connection of the deck ledger to the house is getting much better. That's where a lot of the changes were in the 2009, 2012, and 2015 code updates. In the 2018 and 2021 codes, they started getting better at some of the other issues. The real go-to document is DCA 6, from the American Wood Council. That's a free download from [awc.org](http://awc.org). If you build a deck to that, you've built a good deck.

### WHO SHOULD BECOME A CERTIFIED DECK INSPECTOR?

Probably every home inspector. It doesn't mean you have to use it. The more education you get the better.

One of the points I make is that it's really hard to find a defect if you don't know what it looks like. The more education you get the more you're going to know what a defect is. If you take the eight-hour class, you'll know more of what to look for in the regular inspection and you could wind up saving your client's life or save them from catastrophic injury.

### CAN YOU SHARE AN EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD INSPECTING DECKS IN YOUR CAREER?

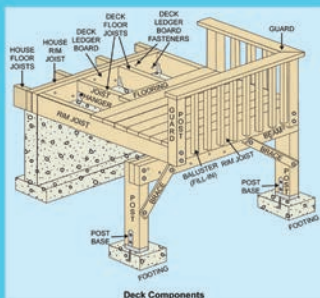
One of the agents I work with has the running joke that I've never met a deck I liked because there's something wrong with virtually all of them. Sometimes it's relatively minor, but the biggest example I can give is the guardrail connection. That's almost always wrong, and that's probably the #1 or #2 failure point. What happens over time is that the wood gets soft, the connection fails, then everybody's out on the deck and they're taking a selfie, leaning against the rail, and all of a sudden the rail fails and they're all on the ground. If it's a tall deck, that can be nasty.

### WHY DO SO MANY DECKS HAVE ISSUES?

It's a lack of education of the deck builders and code officials. That's improving over time, but the decks of 10, 15, or 20 years ago are still out there and were built before modern updated codes.

I don't think anyone sets out to build a bad deck. Decks are a favorite DIY project, and those are the scary ones. A lot of times, since they're in the backyard, people don't pull a permit, those decks are not inspected, and the homeowner just doesn't know.

## A Practical Guide to Evaluating Decks



**Bruce A. Barker**



I reviewed this book, and it is an outstanding resource for homeowners to flag issues that may be an unsafe or dangerous condition for the occupants. The author, Bruce Barker, is likely the most experienced and knowledgeable residential deck inspector in the U.S.  
Review from Barnes & Noble.com

\$34.95 Full Color

Available at [www.Lulu.com](http://www.Lulu.com)

A man with glasses and a beard is shown in profile, focused on writing in a notebook. He is wearing a denim shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing a window with warm, golden light, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting. The overall mood is professional and diligent.

# AN INSPECTOR'S EXPERIENCE WITH TECHNICAL REPORT WRITING

By Aaron Miller

**S**uppose you have the passion to excel in the profession of home inspection. In that case, the only way to express your professionalism and competence is by learning how to craft first-class inspection reports. If you cannot communicate to your clients, homeowners, builders, repair contractors, attorneys, agents, and so forth what you've observed, what you think, and why you think it, you can never become a competent inspector. No, this is not hyperbole. It has been my experience that the capacity to communicate is the highest-level skill for inspectors, and communicating in writing is of the utmost importance.





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*Opinions or statements of authors are solely their own and do not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of ASHI, its agents, or editors. Always check with your local governmental agency and independently verify for accuracy, completeness, and reliability.*

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Technical report writing is usually not taught in public schools, and few choose to take courses in this discipline at the university level. It is not a genetically acquired ability, and no computer program I am aware of is capable of substituting for learning this vital skill. To learn, you will need to devote an inordinate amount of time, focus, and energy toward these ends.

Those who enter this profession lacking the ability to write may need to begin with the basics. Any number of free online courses can help you learn or revisit elementary grammar and syntax. Many courses and game apps deal with vocabulary improvement. Books on any of these subjects abound in libraries, bookstores, and online venues. These sources should be drawn upon throughout your career as an inspector.

You can also look for examples of good report writing to emulate. These can be found in many locations. Often inspectors post sample inspection reports on their websites. While not all of these make for the best examples, one can still learn from them—even if it's just how not to write. Other examples can be found in engineers' reports. Attorney briefs are also an excellent source of clear writing about complicated matters. Many of these can be found on the internet, Google Scholar, and your local District Court records.

You also need to understand the writing of the residential and commercial industry standards upon which your reports must be predicated. Too many inspectors labor under the false notion that their reports are not based in the building and electrical codes. This is merely an excuse to avoid learning and the work that this entails. Worshiping at the altar of minimalism via leaning on the crutch of whatever Standards of Practice one chooses is a sure way to become an underachiever and a failure in this profession.

### REPORT WRITING SOFTWARE

I have the dubious honor of working in the only state (to my knowledge) that promulgates an inspection report form. Unfortunately, the check box format used in Texas has insinuated itself into the profession and can be found in one form or the other in most reports I have seen from across the country. This is possibly the worst way to effectively impart knowledge regarding property condition to laypersons as well as other professionals. Hybrid checkbox reports that allow for some expounding via narrative writing are stilted and require much jumping through hoops in order to produce clear results.

All of the software programs I have encountered—and I have tried them all—are primarily focused on doing multiple inspections in a day. These are sold to those who are only interested in volume. Quality is not a concern. Take photos, tick boxes, and email the results all from a smartphone, then on to the next job. Fun, quick, and easy. Just not necessarily professional.

When I started in this business I was forced to use 3-part NCR forms (newcomers can Google that) with the Texas-promulgated report form. Even with the advent of regular personal computer use, there were no capable report writing software programs other than Word for Windows, in my opinion.

All of that said, there are no viable examples of commercial report writing software that I can find that are based upon Word. Regardless of which program you use to write your reports, if they are not replete with insightful narrative regarding the condition of the property in question, instead of containing merely canned commentary, they are substandard. The idea here is to excel and lead in your profession and not to be just another sheep in the flock.

### EXAMPLES AND ANALOGIES

Most laypersons are at least somewhat unfamiliar with building construction and its terminology. It is essential to learn to couch your comments in a way that brings the picture you saw into focus for them. Using examples and analogies is an excellent way to do this. An example is a specific instance of a more general concept or idea. Murder is an example of a crime. An analogy compares two things or ideas to show that something true about thing No. 1 is also true about thing No. 2. "Dry skin is like cracked earth" is an analogy.

### ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations in reports can, and should, take many forms. Most folks are visually oriented and better assimilate information if it is provided in all possible visual formats. Beyond the written text, photos taken at the site, graphics illustrating conditions, short videos of specific issues, etc. are necessary to get the message across to as many as possible.

### PHOTOS

Photos nowadays are often taken with smartphones. Smartphone cameras have come a long way since Samsung and Sharp produced the first of these many years ago. This can be a viable tool, though somewhat limited compared with DSLR cameras. Both of these will also create videos.

Other cameras can be handily mounted on long poles or drones. One can also find cameras in endoscopes and infrared devices. Some even use sewer cameras. Recent improvements in the capabilities and pricing make 360-degree cameras, body cameras, action cameras, and more attractive. You should learn to use all of these to your advantage.

When using photos in reports, be sure to utilize callouts to indicate what you are referring to in the pictures. Follow these photos, when applicable, with graphics that further illustrate the issue in question.

### GRAPHICS

Graphics are indispensable in inspection reports. You can acquire these from many different sources. These include, but are certainly not limited to, inspector organizations, CodeCheck®, royalty-free stock, clip art, industry standards literature, and many of the canned report writing software programs. Just be sure you are not infringing on someone's copyright when using them.



***When using photos in reports, be sure to utilize callouts to indicate what you are referring to in the pictures. Follow these photos, when applicable, with graphics that further illustrate the issue in question.***

## HUMOR

The language of technical writing should be concise and even dry in some ways. That said, it can sometimes be a good idea to explain a concept by using an anecdote or a joke to make dense technical content more enjoyable, understandable, and memorable.

Every person has a unique sense of humor. Frequently readers may not understand your jokes. These are some rules on how to include humor in reports:

Do not try to be funny; you should be spontaneous and utilize humor when it makes you laugh. First, read or listen to something amusing in order to get inspired. Don't be insulting or condescending to your reader. You are allowed to make fun of yourself, not other people. Find your style (it can be humorous or severe), and stick with your style.

Using jokes in technical inspection reports is time-consuming, burdensome, and can sometimes be expensive, so be careful.

## BEYOND THE BASICS

Seminars and courses in report writing for engineers, expert witnesses, and other professionals abound on the internet and in colleges. Find these and utilize them. Up your game by obtaining certification from the International Code Council, the National Fire Protection Association, and others so you can better read, understand, interpret, and effectively convey the information in the building, energy, and electrical codes that form the basis of this profession.

Nonstop reading is an essential tool in learning to write. Just as we learn through the writing of others, we learn to write through the same method. The prolific writer Stephen King says this on the subject, in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*:

"The real importance of reading is that it creates an ease and intimacy with the process of writing; one comes to the country of the writer with one's papers and identification pretty much in order. Constant reading will pull you into a place (a mind-set, if you like the phrase) where you can write eagerly and without self-consciousness. It also offers you a constantly growing knowledge of what has been done and what hasn't, what is trite and what is fresh, what works and what just lies there dying (or dead) on the page. The more you read, the less apt you are to make a fool of yourself with your pen or word processor. ... 'Read a lot, write a lot' is the great commandment."

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

*Note that this list is not exhaustive but could be endless. Here are some of my top suggestions. Happy report writing!*

### ***Technical Communication***

by Paul V. Anderson

### ***The Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing and Thinking***

by Barbara Minto

### ***On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction***

by William Zinsser

### ***Words that Sell and More Words that Sell***

by Richard Bayan

### ***Illustrated Building Materials and Techniques***

by Paul Bianchina

### ***RSMeans Illustrated Construction Dictionary***

by John Wiley and Sons

### ***Construction Terms Simply Defined: A Dictionary of Construction and Design You Can Actually Understand***

by Dominique and Greg Nelson

### ***The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms: American English Idiomatic Expressions & Phrases***

by Christine Ammer

### ***Uncle Anthony's Unabridged Analogies***

by Thomas J. Vesper

### ***The Sense of Style***

by Steven Pinker

### ***The Definitions Chapters and Sections in the International Code Council Codes, National Electrical Codes, and others.***

### ***Grammarly writing assistant***

# SUBTLE WAYS TO IMPRESS ON A HOME INSPECTION

By Jameson Malgeri



It's amazing what we get complimented on during a home inspection. We go to great lengths to improve our process, and in many cases things go unnoticed. I thought it would be fun to write an article on some small steps I do that do get noticed. Anyone using a telescoping ladder can probably relate to this phenomenon, as almost every time you bring it out, people are amazed. "That's an amazing ladder; how cool," is a phrase I have heard many times just using my everyday ladder.



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## UNEXPECTED TOOLS

The first thing I think of is my little dustpan. I have what I would call a camping broom I carry in my tool bag. It doesn't take up much space, and anytime I go into a dirty knee wall or attic I make a point to sweep up any cellulose insulation or debris I dragged out with me. Others use vacuums and similar setups, and regardless of what you prefer, it's the thought that counts. I have heard multiple real estate agents say I was their new favorite inspector just for showing a little care and respect for the property.

## FLIP THE LIGHTS

Another small thing I do is turn off the lights. As most of you know, the listing agent typically goes through the home and wakes up the house turning lights on and getting everything ready. I usually start in the basement and work my way up into the attic. When I leave the attic, I make sure to turn off the lights and do the same thing for all floors as I make my way back down to the basement. The only floor I usually leave lights on is the first floor because the agents are there for the end of the inspection. I double-check that the stove is off and thermostats are back in their original setting, and then I offer to do a final conversation about the property with the client outside.

The last thing I say to the listing agent is something like, "I appreciate all your patience, and I got the lights in the attic and basement; the thermostats are back to where they were, and the oven is off." I certainly don't pander to agents, but I can tell you everyone appreciates a little mutual respect, and it never hurts.

## NO DIRTY SHOES

On the subject of respecting the house, a small but essential thing in my mind is footwear. I have a pair of shoes I bring that have never been worn outside, or I bring booties—every time. Even if it's a radon test, it's important to show respect for the homes we are inspecting. Even in some houses where the homeowners were present and I consider them "messy," the gesture is appreciated.

Another trick I love is to use my booties under the attic foldout staircase to protect the hardwood. Like clockwork, someone typically mentions this not being my first rodeo. I think most homeowners would prefer shoes be removed in their homes, even if they don't say so.

## EXTRA CARE

Your tools can easily cause unexpected damage. I am always very careful going by things with my tool belt, for example. We need to get in a lot of places that we don't necessarily fit well in, and I would hate for a screwdriver to scratch a cabinet or something along those lines. I put felt pads on my telescoping ladder because I usually use it indoors. I even bring a small hand towel, which I use to protect things I lay on a counter to limit scratching the surface of any counters. A towel can be very useful—I have used it for various other issues, like leaks or other problems.

## ATTITUDE

This may seem like an obvious one, but I try to be very pleasant. There are no rules saying you can't tell the buyer the house is collapsing with a smile. We are there to deliver facts, not opinions or emotions, and I try to keep that in mind. When I first had kids, I started to realize what a difference a positive attitude will have on your interactions. I try to be happy to be involved, and it is a pleasure to deliver whatever news the house has to offer. Our temperament has a huge effect on our clients, and if you're having a bad day and display it, they could interpret your findings differently or incorrectly.

## AVAILABILITY

This last one is going to be a hot topic for some of you, but I offer my direct info to everyone. I tell every client they can contact me after they get the report or even when they move into the property. This sounds like it is a lot to offer, and some may picture my phone ringing off the hook. I am always amazed how few people take me up on this, particularly when I am doing a good job explaining everything onsite. Believe it or not, my phone rarely rings with calls from prior customers. They probably don't need you if you did a thorough job in the first place, so why not offer in case they do?

You probably do a lot of this already. This is what works for me, and I would love to learn new tips, too. These steps have little to do with my actual inspections, but I find them to be the actions that are most routinely appreciated and commented on by the parties at the inspection. I hope this is helpful for inspectors, particularly newer inspectors, as I think the general theme is respect. We may be the "expert," but we can also give a good name to our profession by respecting all the involved parties.



## CHAPTER UPDATES

### **NNEC ASHI EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR**

**WEDNESDAY 15, JUNE 2022**

#### **MORNING SESSION**

##### **MOISTURE AND LEAK INVESTIGATIONS**

Is ice wet?

Does a moisture meter always measure moisture?

How can construction designs and defects lead to moisture intrusions?

How can a crack in a center chimney cause the siding paint to peel at the front of a house?

The presentation by Jeff May, Certified Microbial Consultant (CMC) and licensed Mold Assessor, will answer these questions and discuss patterns of liquid flow, patterns of condensation, relative humidity, dew point and measuring the moisture content of surfaces.

#### **AFTERNOON SESSION**

##### **WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND HOW TO DISCUSS THE HOMEOWNERS BUILDING SCIENCE!**

Candace Lord, BPI, Vice President of The Green Cocoon Materials, their uses, pros and cons and common installation mistakes

Vapor barriers and moisture concerns (mold, condensation, and leaks), ventilation, thermal vs ignition barriers and air sealing.

**PURITAN CONFERENCE & EVENT CENTER**

245 Hooksett RD Manchester, NH

8:30 am Registration and Morning Refreshments

9 am to 4 pm Educational Seminar and Lunch

Beef, Chicken or Lamb

NNEC Members — FREE

NON-Members — \$125

Educational Credits: MA-6, NH-6, and ASHI-7

Reservations are required for this event by Wednesday June 8 2022 by calling Karen at 781-789-7040 or by emailing [nnecc.ashi.2016@gmail.com](mailto:nnecc.ashi.2016@gmail.com)

### **OHIO CHAPTER SAVE THE DATE**

**JUNE 17<sup>TH</sup> - 18<sup>TH</sup>, 2022**

**YES! IT'S LIVE YES!**

**IT'S IN PERSON**

**YES! IT'S OHIO ASHI EDUCATION**

**6 STATE AND ASHI CE CREDITS ON FRIDAY,  
8 STATE AND ASHI CE CREDITS ON SATURDAY  
FRIDAY**

Registration: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Education: 9:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Inspector MEET AND GREET for all registrants,  
4:30 PM - 6:30 PM.

**LAST CHANCE FOR VALUABLE STATE CE CREDITS  
NEEDED FOR LICENSE RENEWAL**

**LOCATION** Quest Center

9200 Worthington Road Suite 400  
Westerville, Ohio 43082  
(614) 540-5540





### THIRTY YEARS

Daniel Bajus  
HomeSight Inspections

Richard Castell  
Castell Home Consultants, Inc.

John Moriarty  
Homebuyers Inspections, Inc.

Guy Occhino  
Sherman Home Inspections LLC

Stephen J. Sala  
Stephen Home Inspection Inc.

Steven Zimmer  
Gulf Coast Inspection Services, Inc.

### TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Timothy Bench  
JCTB Inspections, Inc.

Rob W. Cahill  
National Inspection Service of Indiana, Inc.

Joe Glas  
Bee Sure Home Inspections

Andrew Griffith  
Griffith Home Analysis

Michael Healy  
Tiger Home Inspection Inc.

Mark S. Londner  
LBI Home & Building Inspection

Kenneth M. Marchi  
Ken Marchi's Professional Team Inspection Services

Michael Strom-Berg  
Compass Home Inspections LLC

### TWENTY YEARS

Bruce A. Barker  
Dream Home Consultants

George Basista  
Bass Home Inspection, Inc.

Mike W. Bouchillon  
American Equity Home Inspections LLC

Kenneth Colwell  
Colwell Inspection Group

Ronald Cooley  
National Property Inspections

Stephen B. Friday  
Consumer Resources

John P. Heffner  
BPG Inspection LLC

Timothy A. Hennelly  
Casa Buena Inspections

Joseph Janosz  
Pro-Team Property Inspections

Nancy Janosz  
Pro-Team Property Inspections

Eddie Konrad  
A Protection Home Inspection

Bobby D. Monk-Master Builder  
Best Inspections, Inc.

Will F. Morgan  
Morgan and Morgan Home Inspection Consultants

### FIFTEEN YEARS

John Alastick  
BPG Inspection LLC

Ralph Bertke  
RFB Property Inspections

Angel Calle  
Angel Calle LLC DBA Pillar to Post Home Inspection

Robert H. Conner  
Better Life Inspection Company

Neil Desmond  
General Inspections

Daniel J. Doyle  
Deck Plate Home Inspections, LLC

Brett Gordon World Class Home Inspections LLC

James "Med" M. Grubbs  
Gerald Hargrove Inspection Services

Robert E. Hintze  
Waypoint Property Inspection, LLC

Blane R. Hope  
At Your Service, Inc.

Jim Keeling  
All Pro Home Inspection Services, LLC

Robert Klebanoff  
All Seasons Professional Home Inspection Services

Ron Larson  
Residential Inspection Services

Alvin C. Miller  
Hawkeye Home Inspections LLC

Alan S. Miller, ASM

Keith Rauch  
Seagate Inspections, Inc.

Brent L. Simmerman  
Midlands Home Inspections, Inc

Ken Trudgeon  
Home Inspection Protection, LLC

Duane A. Younger  
Twin Peaks Inspections

### TEN YEARS

Richard K. Caby  
Pillar to Post - The Chad Borah Team

Gary A. Griffin  
Griffin Homes Inspection

William Halstead  
Halstead Home Inspections LLC

Kevin Hanly  
Hanly's Home Inspections

Michael E. Imsand  
Georgia Building Consultants LLC

Doug Johnson  
Inspect Mobile, LLC

Mark Kissee  
Kissee Inspection Services

Steve McBride  
Pillar to Post

Dan Plotner  
Patriot Home Inspection, LLC

Russell Poe  
Best 1 Home Inspection

Gary Somerville  
Check It Home Inspections

George Ury  
Structure Tech Home Inspections

### FIVE YEARS

Brian Adams  
Adams Home Inspection Services

Terry Bechtold  
Liberty Inspectors LLC

Doron Bracha  
Accent Home Inspection, LLC

Jamie Brough  
Mountaineer Home Inspections

Joseph Bryant  
Pillar to Post - The Scott Frederick Team

Peter Bunai

Raymond Burgess  
Allstate Home Inspection

John Caldwell  
JHC Home Solutions LLC dba WIN Home Inspection

Dave Danicich  
Peak Home Inspections, LLC

Amanda Dennis  
City of Stanley

Brent Durborow  
Enviroquest, Inc.

James Edwards  
Preferred Home Inspection Service, LLC

Chris Fenter  
Pillar to Post - The Scott Frederick Team

Neil Fring  
Pillar to Post

Joe Gardino  
Ideal Advantage Home Inspections

George Gibson  
GIC Home Inspections, LLC

Todd Gourley  
Reveal360 Inspection Services LLC

Joseph L. Helmsderfer  
AmeriSpec Inspection Services

Doug Hensley  
Hensley Inspection Services

Chris James  
Pillar to Post

Richard LeGrand  
Alliance

Keith Naurath  
Granite Mountain Home Inspections, LLC

Dustin Palposi

Heath Papinchak  
Welcome Home, Home Inspections

Josh Rigsby  
ACE Inspections LLC

Harold Roosa  
Roosa Home Inspection & Contracting LLC

Forrest Ruel  
Home Standards Inspection Services

John Schroeder  
Pillar to Post Home Inspectors

Bill Srock  
Wolverine Home & Property Inspections, LLC

Christopher Brian Stinnett  
Foresight Property Inspections, LLC

Marcus Stonestreet

Robert Stoy  
Start Smart Services, LLC

Jesse L. Stufflebeam  
Xtra Mile Home Inspection Services

Matthew Welsch  
Homeworks Advantage Inspections

Pamela Wright  
Fairview Property Consultants, LLC

Charlie Wright  
Tri-County Inspection Co., Inc.

# HARRY MORRELL ON HIS JOURNEY THROUGH ASHI AND THE KEYS TO GREAT BUSINESS

By Laura Rote, Editor





*Opinions or statements of authors are solely their own and do not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of ASHI, its agents, or editors. Always check with your local governmental agency and independently verify for accuracy, completeness, and reliability.*



**H**arry Morrell was a teenager when he got started in the building and construction industry. "My first job in construction was as a roofer. I lied about my age when I was in high school and got onto one of the biggest roofing companies in Miami, Florida at the time," he said. "I just loved construction."

He's now been a home inspector for more than 20 years—nearly all of those with ASHI; He said those early days were formative. His father was an engineer, and the family lived in Venezuela when he was growing up. "I used to love watching the big cranes and heavy equipment build these huge oil refineries. The construction industry was always in the back of my mind," Morrell said.

***"We've got a great reputation here. Some brokers tell their real estate agents, 'You have to be in ASHI. Here in St. Louis that's an unwritten rule.' So being involved in running the chapters was certainly an asset for successful business," Morrell said.***

## HOW HE GOT HERE

From childhood in South America to working part-time in the summer as a roofer in Miami, Morrell has many memories of hard work and tar and gravel roofs. He worked on commercial buildings, but soon joined the US Naval Construction Battalions, better known as the Navy Seabees. It was the late '60s and early '70s, and they built everything from airports and roads to firebases for the Marines. He ultimately served two tours in Vietnam and was last stationed in The Philippines, building a large airport.

When Morrell returned to the States, it was a time of recession, complete with long gas lines and virtually no construction. So he finished his degree at Florida State University and moved on to Dallas—an area that was still booming with construction thanks to the oil industry. Dallas is where he met his current business partner, fellow ASHI member and cofounder of Allied Building Inspections Allen Sebaugh.

## STARTING—AND GROWING—A BUSINESS

Morrell said his partner Sebaugh is an engineer who likes to specialize in certified structural inspections, and Morrell does much of the rest (including marketing).

After more than 20 years in Dallas, Morrell moved to St. Louis in 1996 and quickly joined the St. Louis Chapter of ASHI. Since then he's served as chapter president three times—most recently in 2020. "I've always been on committees, and I'm currently the legislative chair for the state," he said. "I love to be involved."

Morrell said that level of commitment has been easier now that his children are grown, but his plan was always to be involved with ASHI. He said it's simply good business, as ASHI is well-known in St. Louis. The Midwest city is home to at least four ASHI national presidents—including current president John Wessling. Morrell said everyone he talked to was either a member of or supportive of ASHI—from home inspectors to lawyers to real estate agents.

"We've got a great reputation here," he said. "Some brokers tell their real estate agents, 'You have to be in ASHI. Here in St. Louis that's an unwritten rule.' So being involved in running the chapters was certainly an asset for successful business."





## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Even through hard times like after 9/11 and the financial crisis of 2008, Morrell continued to find work. He attributes part of that to the many relationships he's built through ASHI. "I was very fortunate," he said. "I've got a lot of brokers, lawyers, and REALTORS® who are very loyal. You do a good job for them, and they're going to stick with you. I've had REALTORS I've worked with for more than 20 years."

But it's not just time that builds relationships. Morrell said a lot of it comes down to being included. The St. Louis Chapter of ASHI has long invited real estate agents and others in the industry to watch the home inspectors train. "They don't like to see any surprises on how we inspect, so we said, 'Listen. Come on over and have a seat and a coffee and sit in on one of our training sessions.' They really loved that."

Being available to answer questions goes a long way, Morrell said. And from there, he said, word spread—in a good way. If someone in the area needed a home inspector, they often turned to Morrell or one of his colleagues.

## AN EVOLVING INDUSTRY

Of course, the industry has changed a lot since Morrell first joined ASHI. When he started he used a handwritten checklist for a report. He remembers when his oldest son, now a computer engineer but back then still in high school, said he had to get on the computer. It was Morrell's first printed report with photos. People loved it. "Pretty soon everyone got into the computer aspect of it."

Today there are tons of software programs to help write reports, and social media and a strong website are key to many businesses, though Morrell doesn't worry about social media much. Instead he focuses on maintaining relationships and offering the very best services. That's where today's many auxiliary inspections come in. Morrell said this has only made inspections that much more professional and comprehensive. Morrell himself does building, termite, and radon inspections, and he has trusted subcontractors he can offer to do most anything else, from mold to gas pressure to asbestos testing. He was considering buying a drone, but one of his colleagues, another ASHI member, is now a drone pilot, so he turns to him when needed, too. "When people know they can make one phone call to me and I'll set everything up, that's a plus."

## ADVICE

Morrell said he'd advise any new home inspector to join ASHI, no question about it. "Join ASHI national and come to our chapter meetings. You'll meet all the inspectors," he said.

Once you've met a lot of other home inspectors and heard about their journeys, including how they market themselves and what tools they use, he recommends finding your niche. See where you can fill in and make a difference. "Make your own company and your own way of doing things," he said. "We're very fortunate here that we have such an involved chapter. People can sit in. That's the only way to break in," he said. "It's a very specialized industry that you really don't go to college for and come out and start doing it. You have to learn a lot on the job, and fortunately the members in St. Louis are very eager to talk to people just coming in."

That said, Morrell said he is concerned about the industry's growth. He said fewer people seem interested in starting careers as home inspectors, which is a shame because the work is out there. "Last year I had my best year. I was turning down business," he said. "We could use many, many more inspectors."

## AWARD-WINNING

*Harry Morrell was recognized for his contributions to ASHI and the profession at large with the 2021 John E. Cox Member of the Year Award. The annual award recognizes an ASHI Member who has made exceptional contributions to an ASHI Chapter. Morrell has been a dedicated member of the St. Louis Chapter of ASHI since early in his career, taking up multiple posts and serving as a member of the education committee for nearly 20 years.*





# Postcards from the Field

What happens when you build supports on top of a septic tank.



Chris McDougall  
Apex Home Inspection  
Aromas, CA

So close.



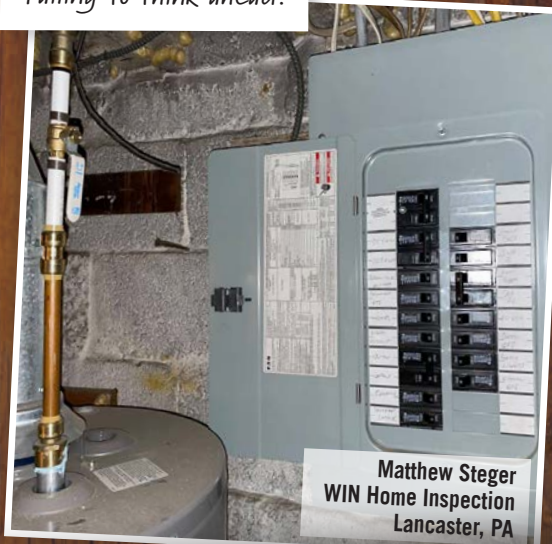
Chris McDougall  
Apex Home Inspection  
Aromas, CA

The first Ring doorbell.



James Brock  
Boston Home Inspectors  
Boston, MA

Failing to think ahead.



Matthew Steger  
WIN Home Inspection  
Lancaster, PA

Will an N95 handle this?



James Brock  
Boston Home Inspectors  
Boston, MA

Compact cars only?



Tom McDonald  
McDonald Home Inspections  
Tucson, AZ



**NEW POSTCARDS EMAIL!** Please send your name, city, state, photos, headings and captions to: [postcards@ashi.org](mailto:postcards@ashi.org)

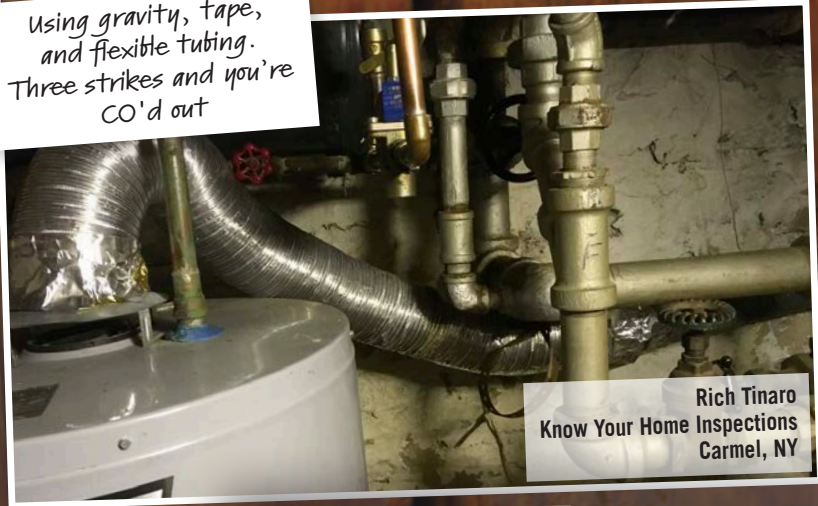
Note: By sending in your postcard(s), you are expressly granting ASHI the right to use the postcard and your name with it in the ASHI REPORTER and in other publications ASHI may select.

Instructions were to change bag daily or after five uses. Whichever comes first.



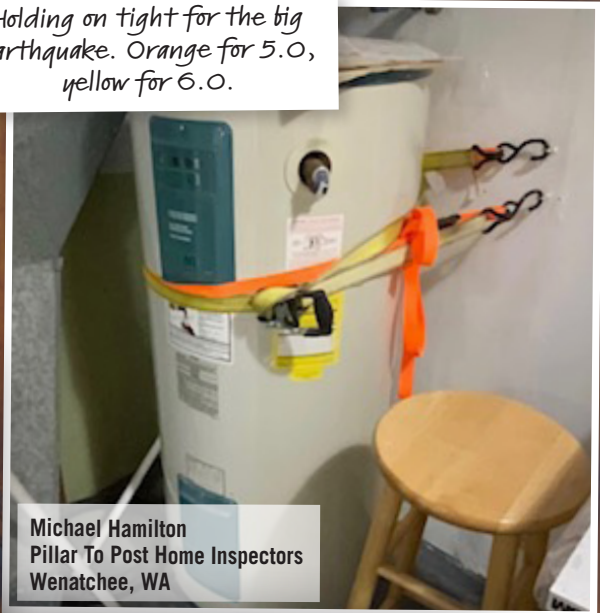
Tom McDonald  
McDonald Home Inspections  
Tucson, AZ

Using gravity, tape, and flexible tubing. Three strikes and you're CO'd out



Rich Tinaro  
Know Your Home Inspections  
Carmel, NY

Holding on tight for the big earthquake. Orange for 5.0, yellow for 6.0.



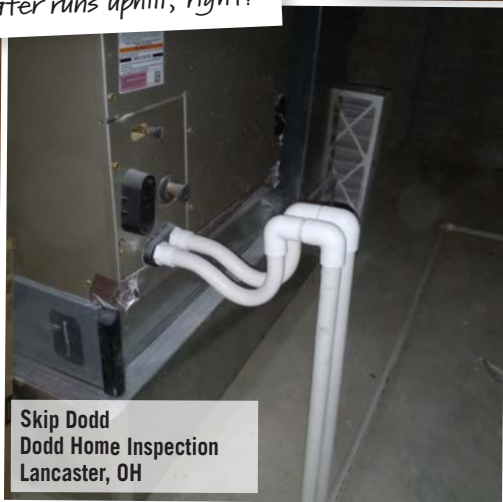
Michael Hamilton  
Pillar To Post Home Inspectors  
Wenatchee, WA

You want AC? Sure, hold my beer.



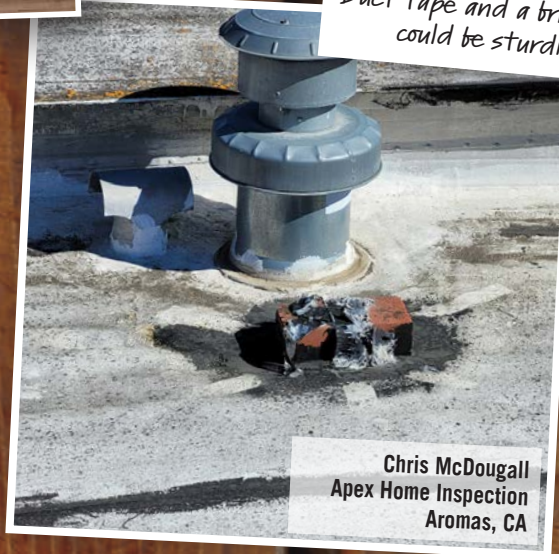
John Ciambello  
Colorado Springs, CO

Water runs uphill, right?



Skip Dodd  
Dodd Home Inspection  
Lancaster, OH

Duct tape and a brick. What could be sturdier?



Chris McDougall  
Apex Home Inspection  
Aromas, CA



# WHAT'S HAPPENING IN ASHI EDGE?

By Chris Karczewski



**A**SHI Edge has been live for a few months, and it's been inspiring to see so many ASHI members taking advantage of the new education platform. We are constantly adding new courses, so if you haven't taken one yet, check it out today at [ashiedge.com](https://ashiedge.com).

In the February 2022 issue of the *Reporter*, I introduced the ASHI Edge, covering an overview of the platform's new features and exploring the educational philosophy driving the education department forward. For this article, I reached out to Carrie Maddox, one of ASHI's instructional designers who works as part of the team developing the ASHI Edge courses. We spoke about the processes that go into course creation and how they take advantage of the new platform's features to create engaging content. Here's what I learned:





# ASHI EDGE

ELEVATE YOUR EDUCATION

**Chris Karczewski:** *To start, tell me a bit about the team who creates these courses for the ASHI Edge.*

**Carrie Maddox:** Within the education department, we have a course creation team. Angela Hall and I are the instructional designers taking the lead on developing the courses on the ASHI Edge. We call upon the other education department members and outside Subject Matter Experts (SME) as needed throughout the process.

Every course development process is different, but generally it begins with Angela taking information from previous learning material like a two-hour video or PowerPoint slide deck and distilling the content into material better suited for the adult learner. With the baseline of the course and content built out, she passes it over to me to bolster certain sections and add in additional learning activities to round out the course and highlight specific concepts within the content.

**CK:** *What is an SME, and what's their role in course development?*

**CM:** Typically, the title of Subject Matter Expert (SME) refers to someone who possesses unique expertise on a particular subject and has vast experience in their field. They are often called upon to leverage and share their knowledge across various applications.

With the ASHI Edge and course development process, the SMEs are asked to do various tasks to verify the information and provide additional insight into the course. Once a course is nearly complete, the SME is asked to review the course and confirm that the content is technically correct. Sometimes they are contacted earlier in the process to provide supplemental materials such as images, diagrams, etc., to help illustrate a lesson in the course. The input they provide to the course is invaluable to ensure quality.

**CK: How do these new courses differ from what we've seen in the past on the ASHI Online Learning Center (AOLC)?**

**CM:** On the AOLC, most were straightforward one-to two-hour courses featuring video or presentation recordings with a brief quiz at the end. With the ASHI Edge, the goal for these new courses is to further enhance the learner's ability to take away key elements needed in the home inspection field. The critical factor that distinguishes the ASHI Edge courses from the AOLC is the increased interactivity with learners. The increased interactivity is made possible by new features available on the ASHI Edge, like:

- Organizational features that make the content more digestible and approachable. One example is the "Click in Pictures" feature that has pulsing dots throughout the image where the learner can click the dot to see/learn more about a characteristic of the original image.

Additionally, the courses feature charts and accordions/tabs to break up information and display content effectively to help the learner avoid getting overwhelmed.

- Activity-based features serve as knowledge checks to apply the concepts and reinforce the lessons. These come in a wide variety, including scenarios, matching exercises, sorting, and flash cards. The idea behind these activities is pretty self-explanatory, and we encourage members to go into the courses to experience for themselves firsthand.

**CK: How do these interactive features improve the learner's retention?**

**CM:** Simply put, participation in a course helps learners retain the information they have learned. Strong retention is essential to pass the course quiz at the end of the module, and so the home inspectors can call upon this information later, such as during their inspection or writing their reports. In a profession like home inspection, where you rely on your expertise to conduct your inspections, retaining information is paramount. We hope to increase the retention and eventual application for all those who take courses on the ASHI Edge with these features.

**CK: Are there any other tools learners can utilize that help bolster their retention?**

**CM:** Included in each of these courses, the learner will have access to a notes guide. The idea behind this guide is to print out a paper copy to follow alongside the course. The guide includes an outline of the course with space to take notes on paper to solidify concepts and information from the lesson.

These notes allow the learner to individualize the instruction based on what they have encountered or need to remember. The notes guide also includes many diagrams seen in the course to notate any items they would like to study or use for future inspections. Notes are an excellent way for a learner to go back and recall what they learned in the course or review the information as they find they need it in a future inspection.

**CK: Looking ahead, what are some things you would like to see in the courses?**

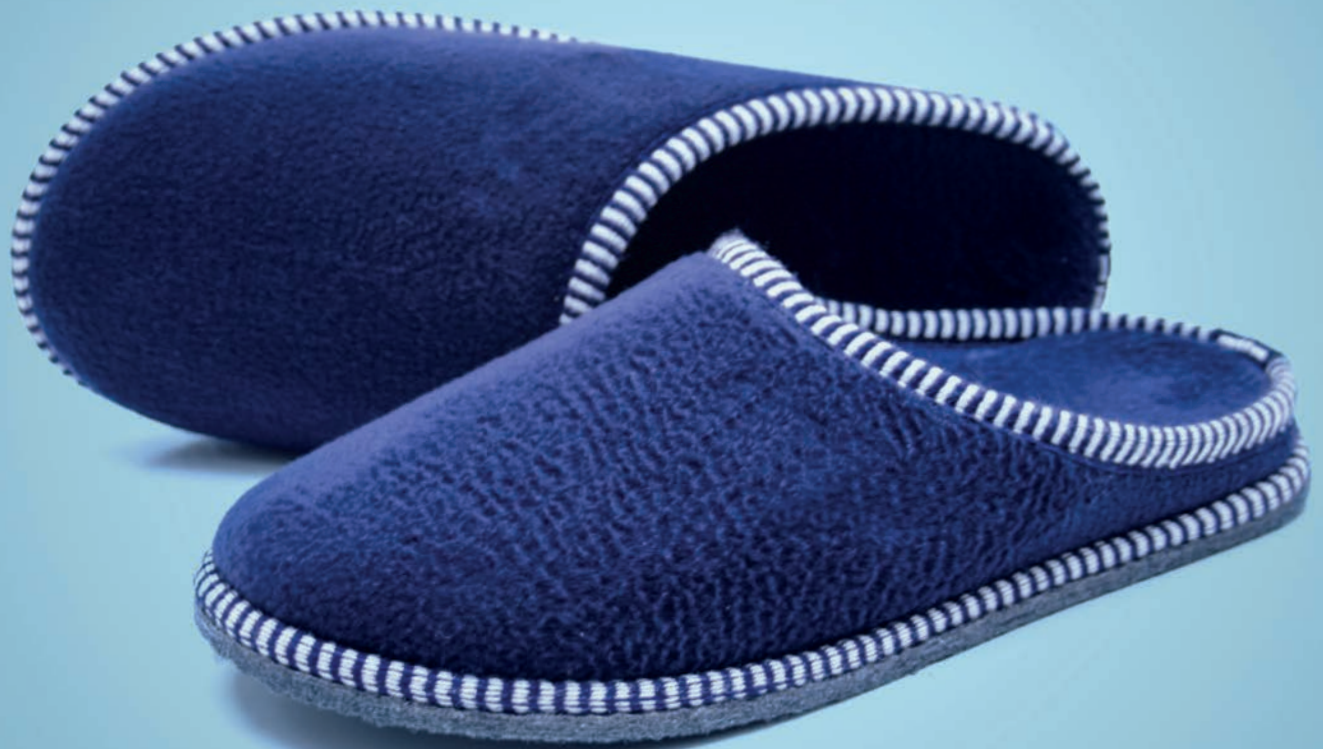
**CM:** We would like our ASHI members to let us know what they would like to see in a course as far as topics go. Is there a specific area where you would like to see more in-depth training? Are there new items now included in home inspections that you need to know more about? We would love to get feedback to better integrate what members want to see and learn in future courses.

We would like to add interactivity in each course to help the learner engage in the learning process. This interactivity allows learners to practice what they have learned as they move through each lesson. As we've covered in this interview, the key to the ASHI Edge is interactivity, so it would be great to see that through all the courses. We're already seeing a great response from the new courses that focus on these increased interactivities, and we hope to add this interactivity to all courses.

**CK: What's next for the ASHI Edge?**

**CM:** Well, we just released a new, interactive plumbing course—Water Conditioning, Recirculation, and Movement; Fuel Storage and Piping. Home inspectors can earn three free CE while adding to their knowledge of water conditioning and recirculation, water heater types, fuel tanks, and more. There are also courses focused on the electrical system and heating system releasing shortly. Members can rest assured that there are many more courses on the way. As you know, there are always more topics to include in home inspection training!





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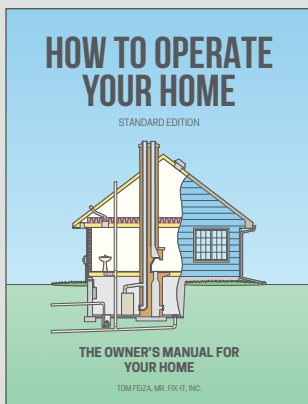
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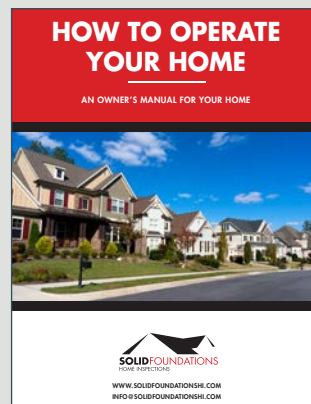
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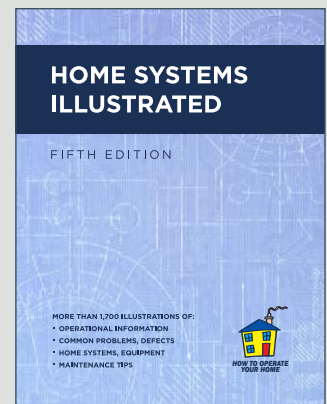
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