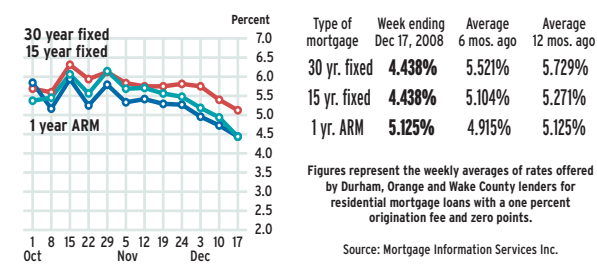


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HOME ENERGY Q&A

Indoor air quality issues, an update

BY KEN SHEINKOPF
MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Q: Over the years, I've read many articles on indoor air quality issues in homes, but never paid much attention until now since I'm getting ready to retire and we want to build a new home in a climate we're not at all familiar with. What do we need to talk to our builder about to be sure he is sensitive to this issue and will build us a safe, comfortable home?

A: Not too long ago, when someone asked about a home's indoor air quality, they were usually talking about the dangers of radon, and an industry has grown with radon-detecting instruments and many builder guidelines on keeping a home protected from this naturally occurring gas that can be found in large concentrations in some parts of the country. Today, however, the whole notion of indoor air quality has grown to encompass a wide variety of potential hazards ranging from indoor household products and outdoor pesticides to asbestos, lead and even tobacco smoke.

There are some great publications available from EPA and many state environmental agencies, and I urge you to check into these and become more familiar with potential problems and ways to minimize or even totally avoid them. People spend a tremendous amount of time inside their homes, and factors ranging from limited fresh air entering the home to a growing use of synthetic building materials have made us more aware of problems with the quality of indoor air.

I usually tell people that there are two general areas of concern that they need to talk about with their home builder — the building materials and the furnishings that are used, and the amount of ventilation in the home.

Solid wood products or exterior-grade pressed wood products used in floors, cabinets and wall surfaces can help keep indoor air problems to a minimum. Strategies like not using permanent adhesives on carpeting over cement floors can also keep moisture from condensing on the carpets, a problem that can give mold and dust mites a place to grow.

Adequate insulation throughout a home is essential, ranging from getting (and using) exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms to putting air-conditioning ducts in closets and using both louvered doors and ventilated shelves to keep air moving and thus reducing mold and mildew problems that could occur.

By the way, if radon is a concern of yours, there are a number of radon-resistant construction techniques that have been shown to minimize the possibility of radon problems, so be sure to talk to your builder about this also.

Ken Sheinkopf is a communications specialist with the American Solar Energy Society (www.ases.org). Send your energy questions to askken@ases.org.

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From the company's inception, President Jennifer Lewis has been dedicated to exceeding expectations and providing exceptional homes at fair prices. Based on homeowner feedback, this dedication has served the company well. "[Homes by J.T. Lewis Builders are]

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CONTRIBUTED BY REBECCA NEWSOME

Gleaming hardwood floors. Soaring ceilings. Extensive moldings and transoms. Flowing plans, interior designer-scrutinized. Huge closets with built-in furniture and benches. Family lockers. Washers and dryers on the first and second floors. Does it sound like this builder gives customers what they want in a new home? You bet ... And this is just the beginning of a very long list of special features Jennifer Lewis offers in her homes. If you're interested in Energy Star or Green building, Jennifer can do that too.

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SMART MOVES

Handling stressful home selling

UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Despite the bleak economic news, real estate specialists say there's a solid reason for optimism among homeowners who've recently put their properties on the market or who plan to do so in early 2009. That's because mortgage rates are now remarkably low, bringing more properties within reach of the people who hanker to own them.

"Lots of people in their 20s and 30s are itching to get out of their rental apartments and into a house of their own," says Mark Nash, the Chicago-based author of "1001 Tips for Buying and Selling a Home."

Nash isn't predicting a dramatic reversal that will convert the currently strong buyers' market into a sellers' market in 2009. But he's convinced that market conditions for sellers will gradually improve



Ellen JAMES MARTIN

as the year progresses. And he says the sellers who will succeed are those who price realistically and also manage their stress effectively.

"You're more likely to get decent offers if you convey calm and confidence and aren't bouncing off the walls with worry about selling your house," Nash says.

But with housing markets in turmoil, it isn't always easy for homeowners to manage what real estate agents call "house karma," the anxiety that seems to pervade a property when its owners are worried about its sale. You may need some guidance. Here are a few

pointers for sellers:

■ Locate a listing agent who has ridden out a past recession or two.

It's not only homeowners who are troubled by stress due to the current turmoil in the home-selling market. Many real estate agents, whose livelihoods depend on commissions from sales that go through, are also prone to worry, says Blaine Rickford, the president of an independent mortgage firm.

Because stress is contagious, you'll want to avoid choosing a listing agent who handles anxiety poorly. Picking a composed, unflappable agent can greatly enhance your chances of a smooth housing transition, he says.

Nash says it's always smart to ask for references from clients for whom the agent has recently worked.

Also, look for experience.

"Limit your search solely to people who've been in the business for at least eight to 10 years and who've weathered at least one recession. They're more likely to be optimists because they know this downturn is temporary," he says.

■ Disappear when your property is shown to prospects.

Homeowners who are nervous about selling their property often presume their presence at showings could prove helpful. After all, they reason, who could better direct prospects around the home and answer visitors' questions than the owners themselves?

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