

WALK THE WALK

by

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During a home inspection, your primary focus is on the house. Your field procedure dictates that you inspect, look upward, talk to nervous clients and balance on one foot while performing a home inspection. The complexity of or task while on site and the distractions that we face make it easy to forget to "walk the walk" - meaning don't forget to inspect the walkways. After all, the walkways are part of the EXTERIOR SYSTEM as listed within the Standards and you are required to observe an report accordingly.

Why waste time thinking about a walkway you ask? Well, a walkway is part of the means of egress from the home. It is the "discharge" pathway and it must be maintained in a safe and functional condition all the way from the street or driveway to the entrance. More importantly, defects in the walkway may represent a "major defect" and may pose a risk of personal injury for the user. An omission in this area could be very costly for a home inspector.

All to often, my inspection reveals a walkway that has never been maintained since it was built or was built using substandard materials and workmanship. When combined with the passage of time and exposure to the elements, a neglected walk is sure to exhibit signs of deterioration. As stated above, a walkway may pose a risk of personal injury for the user, especially if there are steps built into the walkway. The steps must conform to uniform standards with proper treads & risers, level and with no decay. A good walkway is built upon a solid footing or base that prevents erosion and frost heave and with curbing that will prevent gravel or brick migration onto the lawn. The walkway should provide a reasonably direct approach to the home for use during all weather conditions.

Unfortunately, many walkways exhibit signs of settlement and contain "offsets" that represent tripping hazards. I'm sure that you have seen brick or gravel walkways with wood used as curbs and wood used as treads - what a sad substitute for good old concrete. Even treated lumber in soil contact has a tenuous service life and must be inspected for decay, fungi or termites. With time, the base materials beneath such walks erodes causing the bricks or gravel to settle lower than the wood curbs and treads - a sure place for an accidental slip, trip or fall and a potential claim. For defensive purposes, it is critical that your report describe such walkways as being **UNSAFE** and that you recommend repair or replacement as an urgent safety priority.

One of the next most important walkway deficiencies to look for is proper drainage. The walkway must direct surface water away from the home for obvious reasons and it must not contain any sunken spots that will retain water or ice. You should evaluate the walk drainage as you "walk the walk".

A partial list of walk defects to look for includes: faulty drainage towards the home, sunken spots,

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a missing or incomplete walk, missing bricks, loose bricks, broken bricks, eroded mortar joints, weed growth, faulty curbing, decayed curbing, migration onto the lawn, loose stones, frost heave, cracks, spalling, missing expansion joints, decayed wood, fungi, insects, tripping hazards, root damage, worn asphalt, broken edges, erosion, sharp edges, unsafe steps, etc.

In closing, don't forget to "walk the walk" and document your observations. Like everything else that you inspect, the walk requires your professional scrutiny and the Standards require that you report it.

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