

Home Inspector Exam Benefits Consumers and Professionals

Most home inspectors working in the field today would agree that their job satisfaction comes from educating and assisting consumers about what is often the most important purchase of their lives—buying a home. Consumers directly benefit when they choose a professional home inspector who has passed a valid, reliable and legally defensible competence assessment test such as the National Home Inspector Examination (NHIE). This examination increases confidence in licensed home inspectors and provides a competency benchmark for consumers in unlicensed states.

In public protection, the right examination matters

Licensing and regulation of home inspectors within individual states has been a steady trend since the early 1990's. However, by late in the decade, it was apparent that state laws already in place and new legislation being introduced lacked consistency. These laws ranged from registration that simply required a fee in order to call oneself a home inspector all the way up to full licensing requirements. Decision-makers at the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), at that time the largest membership association for home inspectors, believed that uniformity of regulation was important to protect both consumers and home inspectors. One way to provide consistency among the varying state laws and regulations would be to require each licensed home inspector to pass a "high stakes" public protection test.

The challenge was that development of a public protection test is quite costly and time consuming. There are also particular standards for development of such a test that require the body that manages it to be independent from influence by the profession being tested. These standards are recommended by bodies such as the American Educational Research Association and the National Organization for Competency Assurance

among others. On the advice and counsel of examination development professionals, ASHI established the Examination Board of Professional Home Inspectors in July 1999 as an independent, incorporated not-for-profit organization with its own board of directors. By adopting an examination developed by EBPHI, state legislatures would now avoid the potential liability in using an examination closely tied to a home inspector membership association.

The first "content blueprint" for the National Home Inspector Examination was developed in 1999 when experienced home inspectors from all over the U.S. met to discuss and determine a competency baseline for practitioners. This "role delineation study" was performed with the guidance of test development firm Columbia Assessment Services (now CASTLE Worldwide), and was then sent in survey form to hundreds of home inspectors throughout North America to determine its similarity with the actual practices of home inspectors. Five years later, in accordance with accepted test maintenance standards, a second study was performed to ensure that the NHIE was current with accepted practices. More than 1800 home inspectors were

surveyed in the 2003 study which produced the present content blueprint for the test. EBPHI is currently conducting its third study with results expected in early 2008.

Development of the National Home Inspector Examination is a complex process, requiring procedures that ensure validity, reliability and legal defensibility. To be valid, the content of the exam must be job-related and cover areas where lack of knowledge could cause harm to the public. It is also important for the exam to reliably measure a candidate's skills. Finally, the test must be defensible; the processes must demonstrate that the test is reliable and valid under legal scrutiny.

Home inspector regulation

Texas was the first state to regulate home inspectors, enacting its licensing law in 1991. There are now thirty-nine states requiring licensing or some lesser regulation; twenty-seven of these states require competency testing. Louisiana enacted their home inspector regulations in 1999 and adopted the National Home Inspector Examination for all applicants. "There were people involved in the grassroots development of the law that wanted to come up with their own exam," said Donald W. Lewis, chief operating officer, Louisiana State Board of Home Inspectors. "The intent was to copy Texas and what they did. But we said, 'there is already an excellent test out there with an excellent reputation.' By using the National Home Inspector Examination, we can direct our efforts to areas that really need fixing. This is an excellent product to opt for," he said.


Of the twenty-seven states that require a test for home inspector regulation, nineteen have adopted the National Home Inspector Examination as their competency assessment test.

"(The NHIE) was the only existing examination that we knew of that met the criteria for a reasonably defensible registration examination," said Ron Dalrymple, executive director of the Arizona Board of Technical Registration. Arizona adopted the NHIE in 2002. "It was already being used in a number of states and that would simplify the processing of applications from registrants in those states seeking registration in Arizona," he said.


Home inspectors accept the challenge

The National Home Inspector Examination assesses competence in the practice of home inspection, based on clear and concise definition of the knowledge, skills and tasks needed for competent job performance generated by the 2003 Role Delineation Study. The exam consists of 200 multiple choice questions covering four content areas: building systems, inspection methods, reporting and professional practice.

Inspectors find that taking the exam is helpful to them as professionals. "Knowing the NHIE is tough and comprehensive, I forced myself to raise my personal bar of job knowledge," said Jack Fehlandt, retired Illinois home inspector and current Kaplan/Inspection Training Associates instructor. "If I wanted to be recognized as a true professional, I had to meet a high national standard of excellence for our industry. I took and passed the exam in 1992 when I was first starting in the business



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and again in 2002 for my Illinois home inspector license. It was nice to be able to tell the public that no one in Illinois was grandfathered; every one of us had to take and pass the NHIE."

Fehlandt said some areas of the exam are more difficult than others. "Electrical gives more people the most difficulty even in school. You can't put your hands on electrons or voltage the way you can gas pipes, furnaces and so on," he said.

Preparing for the exam ahead of time is necessary for most people. Prior experience in the building trades or home repair is helpful when taking the exam. Preparation can include courses with training companies that cover the content of the exam. Candidates can also visit EBPHI's website at www.homeinspectionexam.org for a list of suggested reading material.

States that now require the National Home Inspector Examination in home inspector regulations have found it advantageous for both the inspector and the general public.

"Since report writing is the final product (for home inspectors), the ability to comprehend what you read and figure on a test is very important," said Lewis of the Louisiana State Board of Home Inspectors.

"There are some people out there that could be pretty good home inspectors without taking a test, but pretty good is not good enough," he said. "Like an attorney having to pass the bar exam, you have to prove you know your requirements, that you can supply the answers on demand. NHIE helps us have the best home inspectors in the country because of the requirements. Public safety is the number one concern." ■

Noël Zak is the executive director of the Examination Board of Professional Home Inspectors. For more information, please contact www.homeinspectionexam.org. EBPHI is now accepting applications for an open seat on its Board of Directors. The term is two years, beginning in January 2008. Home inspectors serving on the EBPHI Board must have passed the National Home Inspector Examination in addition to other requirements. For an application, go to www.homeinspectionexam.org.

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