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What Are the Dangers of Buying a House With Foundation Issues?



Finding the perfect home can take months or even years, and when you see “the one” learning that it has foundation issues during the inspection stage can be heartbreaking. There are several dangers and risks that you’ll take on if you decide to proceed with the purchase anyway, although in most instances these problems can be dealt with, the cost, time and stress involved may not be worth it.

Understanding what you may be up against before you sign on the dotted line makes it easier to deal with foundation issues once you have the keys. Before you do anything, hire a structural engineer to inspect the property and let you know exactly what needs to be done, in most cases, the average home inspector isn’t qualified to give you details on what the foundation, and the rest of the home may need to have done to it to make it right again.

You May Need Different Financing

If you're already prequalified for a loan, especially through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA loan), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and stricter traditional lenders, you may need different financing. Unlike traditional loans, VA and HUD programs require that the home is structurally sound, and any foundation problems may result in them not financing that specific house. Even if a lender decides to finance the home anyway, you may be subject to higher interest rates or need to provide a bigger down payment.

Cost of Repairing the Foundation

Cracks in the foundation that are less than 1/4 inch wide usually only require minor repair, however anything more than may require more extensive repair. Patching cracks can cost a few thousand dollars, depending on where you live, and this doesn't address the cause of the cracking in the first place, which you'll also need to fix at some point. This can be as small as fixing and replacing gutters and downspouts and grading the property around the home so that the ground slopes away from the foundation, or as major as rebuilding part or all of the foundation. Rebuilding part of the foundation can cost tens of thousands of dollars; for an entirely new foundation, you could be looking at a bill of upwards of \$100,000.

Cost of Repairing Related Damage

When there are issues with the foundation, there are likely problems elsewhere in the home, and buying a house with foundation issues means you'll have more household repairs to contend with down the line. Cracks in drywall, crooked doors and windows, broken tiles and uneven, thus damaged, hardwood floors all occur when a foundation isn't level and sturdy. Once the foundation is repaired, you'll either have to live with these issues or fix them, which, if you hire a contractor, will be costly depending on the extent of the damage.

It Could Go Deeper Than the Foundation

Foundation issues are no minor thing, however in the majority of cases, the issue can be fixed (although the cost will vary). One of the greatest dangers of buying a home with foundation issues is finding out that, while the foundation was constructed perfectly, the ground beneath it shifted. Most builders perform a soil test (these days), especially when building on unlevel ground, on fill, high water table, close to wetlands or lakes to ensure that the foundation will stay in place, however this test can fail or contractors may fail to do the test. If this is the case, more extensive foundation repairs may have to happen, including lifting up the house to install new Helical foundation piers to level it out and reinforce the existing foundation, are necessary. In extreme cases where damage is extensive, you also run the risk of needing to replace the entire foundation.

Importance of a Home inspection

It is so important when looking at a new home or property to do your due diligence, inspecting the foundation, inspecting all of the drainage items from gutters to the land to sump pump drain outlets ect.. If you suspect that there might be an issue with the foundation consult a structural engineer this could save you time, money and aggravations. If you are purchasing a brand new home or having one built and are questioning the land that is on get a copy of the geotechnical report and have it looked at by a soil engineer and if they believe the soil conditions may be questionable see what the builder or developer has done in the form of engineering the foundation to carry and stabilize the load of the structure, if they have done nothing and just built it using standard building practices then maybe this is not the home for you it could cost you considerable amounts of money later.