

Home inspectors to be licensed

Continuing education, insurance to be required

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Prospective home buyers often count on a home inspector to identify problems that could affect the purchase.

Until now, home inspectors have not needed a license to work in New York state. But that will change under legislation signed by Gov. George E. Pataki that will take effect at the end of 2005.

Backers of the law say it will protect consumers by ensuring home inspectors they hire have met basic training requirements. It also establishes state oversight over the profession.

Home inspectors will be licensed for two years and must pay an initial fee of \$250. The bill says renewals will cost \$100, but that amount could be set higher under final changes to the law.

The state Department of State offers different routes for inspectors to obtain a license, based on training and passing an exam. Applicants who can meet state requirements based on their experience can receive a license without training or testing.

Home inspectors will also be required to go through continuing education, which some of them already do.

The law also creates state oversight in the form of a board that will advise the Secretary of State on areas such as standards for training, continuing education and a code of ethics.

"It's going to mean credibility within the home-buying process," said Gregg Harwood, a home inspector in Binghamton and an American Society of Home Inspectors member. "We're really the only professionals

that home buyers encounter in the process that aren't licensed."

Home inspectors will be required to provide customers with a written report. The law also sets rules designed to prevent conflicts of interest on the job.

The new law will also bring more accountability to the industry, Harwood said. Currently, consumers who have a problem with a home inspection have to go to court; under the law, home inspectors who are accused of violations can face fines or even revocations of their licenses.

Richard Pezzino of Accu-View Property Inspections in Buffalo welcomes the law, saying it will prevent people with no training in the field from presenting themselves to consumers as home inspectors.

"Any good inspector who's been out there for a while knows the type of people we are trying to keep out," he said.

Pezzino said he especially likes provisions requiring home inspectors to carry insurance and to go through continuing education. As a certified real estate inspector with the National Association of Home Inspectors, he already needs to pass a proctored exam and take credit hours to keep his designation with that organization.

New York is the 29th state to regulate either home inspectors or the home inspection industry, said Robert Kociolek, director of chapter relations and state affairs for ASHI. The vast majority of the laws were approved in the past seven or eight years.

"It's a reflection of the maturity of the profession," Kociolek said.

While ASHI does not take a pro or con position on any of the state laws regulating the industry, the group does offer input what it believes any legislation that is adopted should include.

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ASHI grades the laws that are in effect in 29 states - New Jersey gets its top rating - but the organization has not yet had time to evaluate New York state's law, Kociolek said.

Nick Gromicko, executive director of the National Association of Certified Home Inspectors in Pennsylvania, said New York's law is "fine," but he said whether an inspector is licensed should be only one factor home buyers use in choosing who to hire.

The law's backers included Assemblywoman Sandra Lee Wirth, R-Elma, and state Sen. Dale Volker, R-Depew.

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