

The Importance of Having Your Barn Inspected Regularly

A barn is an agricultural building, typically located on a ranch or farm (or former ranch or farm), and used for a variety of purposes, including:

- the storage of farming vehicles, equipment and supplies;
- housing livestock;
- storing hay and other livestock food supplies; and
- as a covered work area.

In a property sale, it's not uncommon for clients to purchase a property for its pastoral and rustic setting because it includes a barn but then not use the structure for its original purpose of housing animals. If a barn is to be converted from a structure that houses livestock to living space for the family, homeowners can expect to make certain modifications beyond those meant merely for aesthetics and convenience.

Weather can greatly affect the condition of the barn. In snowy climates, long, unsupported spans and a lack of interior structural support can make barn roofs vulnerable to collapse. Melted snow can also cause ice dams and structural issues related to moisture intrusion, as well as mold growth.

Barns should be maintained properly by their owners, as well as inspected for mechanical, electrical and fire hazards by a qualified inspector.

Regular inspections of your barn are an important step to maintaining farm safety. Having barns inspected for mechanical, electrical and fire hazards can save you from costly future repairs. As a qualified inspector, I will give you peace of mind about the safety of your investment.



Certified InterNACHI Inspector

- I am a member in good standing of the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors (InterNACHI).
- I adhere to the InterNACHI Standards of Practice.
- I abide by the InterNACHI Code of Ethics.
- I stay up to date with the latest inspection techniques in the industry through Continuing Education.

Contact me today to schedule your inspection.

BARN INSPECTION

The First Step to Farm Safety



Included in an Inspection

Recommendations for Owners

In and around the barn, I will look for the following issues:

- kick damage from horses or livestock;
- manure piles deposited too close to the exterior of the barn;
- excessive dust. Primarily originating from hay, dust can irritate the eyes and respiratory systems of both humans and livestock;
- exposed nails, sharp edges and splinters;
- non-GFCI protected lights and electrical receptacles;
- extension cords. An older barn may not have an updated electrical system, including a lack of receptacles or outlets. Extension cords may overload the system and can also pose a tripping hazard;
- exposed electrical wires that may be reached by inquisitive animals or children;
- a lack of ventilation or shade in the livestock pens, which can cause animals to overheat;
- insufficient room at the feed rack for animals to eat;
- farm implements, such as ladders and hand tools, and farm machinery stored too near animals or in the path of people; and
- fire hazards that are particular to outbuildings and farm structures.

Some of these fire hazards include:

- excessive cobwebs on ceilings and walls, especially near light or heat sources;
- hay stored near sources of light or heat;
- plastic and chemical items that can potentially lead to a fire, if not stored properly. Such items include plastic water buckets, nylon hay bags, nylon saddlebags, plastic stall signs, and chemical flammables, such as weed killers and insecticides;
- no lightning rod. Barns are often built in fields away from trees and other structures, making them prone to lightning strikes and subsequent fires;
- no fire extinguishers; and
- an unmaintained or unmowed field around the barn.

I recommend that owners exercise the following precautions to ensure a safe barn area for both people and animals:

- Loose tools and implements can cause injury, so they should be secured or stored out of the way of pens and footpaths.
- Feed bags and buckets should be emptied and stowed to prevent injury and to avoid creating an easily accessible food source for rodents and other unwelcome pests, which are natural inhabitants on farms anyway. The same goes for water and food bowls for cats and dogs on the farm.
- Water hoses should be drained, coiled and hung off of the floor.
- Electrical wires should run through conduits and not be in plain sight.
- Gasoline, oil and other chemicals should be stored in appropriate sealed containers and out of the feed and animal areas to prevent accidental poisoning or contamination.
- ABC-type fire extinguishers, which can put out wood, fire and hazardous chemical fires, should be placed every 75 feet.
- Hay is extremely flammable and should be stored in a separate building, if possible. Hay should be dried before storage, as wet hay produces heat and can spontaneously combust.
- Light sources should be covered with a protective covering. Jelly-jar fixtures are a common installation in barns.
- Portable electric heat sources should be turned off and unplugged before leaving the barn, as well as away from any potential fuel.

- Doors should be self-latching to prevent the escape of barned animals and the entry of intruders.
- Wood stoves should be properly ventilated, with their fuel kept in a safe container and at a safe distance so as to prevent accidental ignition.
- Skylights and windows should be checked for moisture intrusion and signs of mold growth.
- Whitewashing the interior brick or cement walls every year or so can decrease the incidence of moisture intrusion and mold growth.
- Animal waste should be evacuated from the interior at least daily.
- Conveyor belts used for feeding or for removing waste should be checked regularly to ensure that they are free of oil and dust buildup, which can lead to accidental fire as well as malfunction.
- Dry, tall grass can act as kindling, so a moderate defensible space around outbuildings should be maintained.
- If firewood is used in the home, it should be stored a safe distance from any outbuildings to prevent pest infestation and fire hazards.
- Jute mats should be placed at the barn's entrances to wipe off boots before entering the barn in order to keep its floors as dry and clean as possible to prevent slip hazards.
- Barns should be mucked out and swept daily, and more often during times of increased activity, not only to keep floors free of slip hazards but also to keep unwanted pests and odors in check.

