

## Cracks

It is the nature of many construction materials to crack as they expand and contract, particularly with exposure to moisture as they get wet and dry out, and as they age. The more common of these materials include concrete, asphalt, stucco, brick, mortar, concrete block, plaster, sheetrock and drywall (also known as Gypsum™), and stone.

It is highly likely that your home, even if brand new, has what are considered common cracks in common areas, such as exterior walls, interior walls at corners of doors and windows, ceilings (usually in the middle), foundations (also usually in the middle of each foundation wall), garage floor, patios and porches, walkways, decks and balconies, retaining walls, and solid fences. It is virtually impossible for a home inspector to determine whether cracks are caused by structural failure or by some other cause, or, if caused by structural failure, whether the cause is active and ongoing. TYPICALLY, cracks in patios and porches, driveways, walkways, fences, and planters are not of a major concern to the structural integrity of the building.

However, continued cracking could result in failure in those structures and, depending on the proximity to the house, damage to the structure. The closer other damaged structures are to the house, the more attention needs to be paid to those structures, their cracks, and the causes of those cracks.

We use common definitions when documenting cracks:

**Common cracks** are typically, but not always, defined as hairline cracks less than one-eighth inch wide or less than twelve inches in length. Almost by definition, concrete and stucco will crack, simply because the material shrinks and cracks as it dries, cures, and ages. Common cracks in concrete and stucco are also called shrinkage cracks. Common cracks can appear at any time in the life of a structure, typically at door and window corners where they typically are of least concern. However, they need to be monitored regularly to determine if they are expanding or lengthening, at which point other problems might be present. But you probably won't know until many months or years have passed since we tend not to notice incremental changes.

**Major cracks** are typically, but not always, defined as more than one-eighth inch wide, more than twelve inches in length, excessive in number, unusual (stair-step, V-shaped, straight horizontal, or straight vertical), or in unusual locations (such as middle of a wall with no doors or windows nearby). If major cracks are present or appear, Client should seek additional evaluation from a qualified civil engineer specializing in foundations and structures. Some major cracks occur simply due to neglect and lack of knowledge about how to take care of common cracks. In other words, a common crack can very easily become a major crack if it is ignored.

In most areas of San Diego County, due to the type of weather and rainfall patterns we have, if the affected structure is over ten years of age (what we consider an “older home”), cracks **PROBABLY** do not pose any threat of significant additional short-term damage with **NORMAL CLIMATE, NORMAL RAINFALL, and NORMAL SEISMIC ACTIVITY**. However, as we saw during the 2005-2005 rain season, rain can have a detrimental effect on our houses and foundations at any time. So it is best if cracks and areas around all cracks are repaired and monitored on a regular basis, especially during periods of high rainfall or immediately after seismic activity, and any additional damage should be evaluated by a qualified civil engineer.

If Client is unfamiliar with common cracks, Client should seek the specialized services of a qualified civil engineer for further evaluation and information before close of escrow. **Major cracks, particularly in the foundation, walls, ceilings, and/or attached porches/patios, should be inspected BEFORE CLOSE OF ESCROW to help protect your investment in your home.** Major cracks in driveways, walkways, and other areas typically are more cosmetic than of a critical failure nature but should still be evaluated by a qualified professional to weatherproof cracks to help prevent additional damage and accelerated deterioration.

Note that in many areas of San Diego County (Mission Hills, Kensington, etc.), particularly with older lathe-and-plaster structures, cracks, even major cracks, are not only common, they are the norm. However, all cracks, regardless of their size and where they are located, should be sealed from the weather and regularly monitored to ensure that, if they are active, they don't cause major damage. Additionally, although you might be willing to accept a property with more than its fair share of undiagnosed and/or unrepaired common and major cracks in various areas, the person who seeks to purchase your property somewhere down the road may not be so accepting, thereby leaving you to make repairs then, at which time additional damage might have occurred due to ongoing neglect. It is in your best interest to take care of both common and major cracks now, before close of escrow and while the property belongs to someone else.

In a newer home (one that is no more than ten years old), cracks typically have not developed yet, but they will. Just wait. When they do, re-read this section on cracks, and then, as necessary, weatherproof the cracks and monitor them for widening or lengthening.

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**Recommend repair and/or replacement of affected components.** This means that you might need a licensed structural engineer or foundation professional to look at the cracks, determine their causes, determine if they are active or have the potential to become active, and design appropriate fixes for the specific types of cracks and causes. After that, as with everything else in our homes, you will need to practice regular homeowner monitoring and maintenance.

**Remember that home inspectors are generalists and are not acting in any capacity as licensed engineers under State of California laws. We only document cracks and where they are located. We must, by law, leave determination of the causes, and appropriate fixes, to licensed structural engineers, civil engineers, geotechnical engineers, or other qualified foundation professionals.**

**If you found an inactive link, if you have any questions, or if we can help in any way, please [contact us](#).**

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