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Working with the new CO Alarm Requirement in Home Inspections

Basic Requirement: All single family homes and townhouses are required to have carbon monoxide (CO) alarms installed as of July 1st, 2011. The new standard requires Smoke Detector/CO alarms outside each separate sleeping area and on every level of the dwelling that has a fuel burning appliance, fireplace or attached garage.

Detailed Suggestions:

1. Every home with at least one fuel-burning appliance/heater, attached garage or fireplace should have a Smoke Detector/CO alarm. This means nearly every house in the Bay Area.
2. If the home has only one Smoke Detector/CO alarm, it should be installed in the main bedroom or in the hallway outside of the sleeping area. Place the alarm at least 15 feet away from fuel-burning appliances (furnace, etc).
3. Do not place the Smoke Detector/CO alarm in dead air spaces (closets, for example) or next to a window or door.
4. Make sure nothing is blocking or covering the Smoke Detector/CO alarm.
5. A Smoke Detector/CO alarm should be installed on every level of the home and in sleeping areas.

These are the factors that the home inspector will be checking

Devices that qualify: The devices may be battery-powered, or a plug-in device with a battery back-up, and must be tested and certified pursuant to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and UL Listed. Look for these labels on any products being purchased, as home inspectors will look for these labels.

Age of the CO unit: CO devices must be replaced at least every 7 years. For this reason, when selling a residential property, disclosure of the existence of the devices and its operability may not be sufficient, if the device is more than 7 years old. Best approach is to write the date on the detector or on a small "Post It" note with the date.

Working with the TDS:

1. Use the new TDS form that has the new CO disclosure, and add the date of installation of the CO units if possible
2. Show the TDS to the home inspector to help with compliance verification
3. Let the buyers know this is a requirement that must be filled prior to closing
4. Work with your sellers to get the units installed before the home inspection. This will cut down on confusion and delays.

Marketing: Use this topic as a reason to contact prospective listing clients and bring them up date. This is a good safety tip, and will help them prepare the house for sale.