

From the Home Inspector:

Travis and the Flying Blade

By: John Woodmansee

During home inspections, ceiling fans with their big paddle blades should be evaluated. It troubles home buyers when they make noise, and troubles me when they wobble too much. I've always been fearful one would drop from its mounting on the ceiling. There's no reasonable way to assess their mounting integrity, so I'm taking a chance each time I turn one ON. Of the thousands I've turned ON, none have come loose. Lots of them wobble too much. They are turned OFF immediately and get a negative report.

But one fan did something I won't forget. My young host for this inspection was seven year old Travis, the owner's son. Travis was interested in all that I was doing and stayed out of the way, but asked good, respectful questions like a curious child does. His night shift-working mom was catching up on her sleep in a small family room, but moved from her chair so that I could inspect the room. I reached for the fan over her chair. When the fan started, it lurched sharply, and one of the four blades flew across the room. It hit the wall, ricocheted, and hit Travis in the face. He got a painful hit on his upper gum, but fortunately his injury was minor.

What happened? The blade screws at the hub were very loose, and the starting force was enough to tear them out. Travis' mom said they hadn't used the fan in a long time because it had been making a noise.

What's happened since then? Lots of inspection onlookers have now heard the story of Travis and the Flying Blade. And everyone catches the serious message: **Someone can be hurt during the home inspection routine.**

Here are some of the other dangerous moments for onlookers during an inspection:

1. Climbing up a ladder behind the inspector - to the roof, the attic, etc.
2. Assuming that it is safe to stick one's hand into an electrical panel because the inspector removed the cover. Does this one sound absurd? Not so. An onlooker can get a false sense of safety when the

inspector opens furnace cabinets, electrical panels, etc. They see a competent person and seem to say to themselves "This guy is not getting hurt poking around in this interesting enclosure, so I can, too."

3. Touching hot parts of a kitchen range after testing.
4. Standing under a garage door that is being tested (they may fall apart or come off their tracks).
5. Walking across attic floor framing which is not fully visible due to insulation.
6. In the attic, grabbing for support on poorly attached or dry / weakened wood bracing.
7. Yanking on wires and pipes.
8. Turning ON electrical switches and circuit breakers.
9. Touching anything that could be unexpectedly electrified.
10. Standing where something could fall from above - e.g. the inspector's probe rolling off the roof.

It is important to be mindful of these possibilities during each home inspection. Some of these items may seem like common sense issues, but it's better to warn the onlookers than to risk having an unfortunate accident occur. Remember, just because something's never happened before, there's a first time for everything - just ask Travis!

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