

The Commercial Inspector

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ask the inspector

snapshots from the field

Q. What will the inspector check and look for in a commercial building's plumbing system?

A. The inspector will obtain information about the plumbing system through a visual observation, provide a description of the system and report on issues found in the system. The observation points in most plumbing systems are limited, as a majority of the supply and drain lines are installed under the floor, in the walls or in the ceilings.



The inspector will describe and comment on the following items:

- » **Storm drains.** Note where they are located on the lot and how the water is directed to the drain system. The visual observation is usually limited to the inlet of the storm drain system.
- » **Sanitary drains.** Note type of material used and condition of sanitary drains in the building. Document venting if possible and operate fixtures to allow water to enter the drain lines.

What's wrong with this photo?



This vent stack does not go through the roof far enough, so it could freeze over or become full of snow.

- » **Water supply.** Note type of material used and condition of supply lines in building. Operate fixtures to observe flow of water and to check for obvious leaks in the system.
- » **Fixtures.** Note what fixtures are present, the general condition and functionality of a representative number of fixtures in the building.
- » **Hot water production.** Note the type and condition of the water heater, the fuel source to produce the hot water. Hot water production may be integrated with the heating and cooling system in the building.
- » **Special or unusual plumbing system.** Document the system and whether or not it was operated. An example of a special system is a drip system to water plants outside the



building.

The reporting to share the findings is usually a combination narrative and checklist format that includes representative photos of the plumbing system and photos of the issues documented. The reporting can assist the client in the purchase or lease decision



maintenance matters

Fix Leaks as They Happen



Does one of the following sound familiar?

- » Leaky faucet in a kitchen or bathroom
- » Leaky pipe under a sink in a kitchen or bathroom
- » Leaky toilet in a bathroom

If one of these maladies is plaguing your commercial property, then it's time to call a plumber. Unfixed leaks in a kitchen or bathroom can lead to bigger problems, such as flooding or leaking pipes that damage ceilings and create the potential for a mold problem. Be proactive; have leaks fixed as they occur.

did you know?

What's That Gurgling Sound in the Plumbing System?

The gurgling sound noise you hear from a building drain might mean there's a problem with the drain system itself, or it could signal a number of other issues.

A drain system needs a certain amount of air or venting to allow water flowing in the drain to move efficiently. When not enough air can be drawn through the vent, a gurgle can occur. Common vent issues include the following:

- » The diameter of the vent pipe may be too small for the fixture(s) it is venting.



» The vent stack may not have extended to the exterior of the building. This may cause a dangerous methane gas buildup and could create an explosive situation.

- » The vent is plugged by a nest or an animal seeking heat and unable to get out of the pipe.
- » An undersized vent stack may freeze over in the winter in cold weather climates. Drain systems are usually tested when installed using an air test. All lines are capped off for the test, the cap on the pipe to the exterior may be left in place and not allow proper air admittance.



Gurgling drains can also be caused by a partially blocked waste line. This is most common in a septic system.

If gurgling is heard in the drain system, a plumbing contractor should be brought in to determine the source of the problem and the proper remedy.