

# Buyer Beware: Skeletons in the Closet (and Aliens in the Basement)

PRINCETON, NJ - June 18, 2007 - How much do you suppose a pile of crunchy dead bugs on the basement floor will affect the selling price of a \$500,000 home? How about a life-size skeleton hanging in the closet, or an open coffin in the basement with a dummy vampire inside? Or an overly-ripe kitty litter box under the kitchen table?

The National Association of Exclusive Buyer Agents (NAEBA) recently conducted an online survey of their members to rate the items they found most annoying when searching for a new home with buyers. Since these real estate companies are always looking out for the buyer's best interest they don't pull any punches. The results of the survey are revealing, surprising, and sometimes downright weird.

Here are the top five things exclusive buyer's agents find most annoying when previewing a home:

1. Broken door locks preventing access to the house.
2. Pet deposits in the back yard or dirty cat boxes.
3. Missing light bulbs in the basement.
4. Sellers that ask you to remove shoes and then have wet carpet or dirty floors.
5. Having loose stairs on a stairway or missing banisters.

Other reported annoyances include:

1. Low hanging dining room light fixtures in a vacant home.
2. Closet doors that fall off or are not adjusted properly.
3. Going into a vacant home and hearing animals in the walls.
4. Halloween decorations that are left out.
5. Dangerous children's toys left out.
6. Dead cars in the driveway or yard.
7. Homes on large lots without a survey or description of the lot boundaries.
8. Political signs.
9. Graffiti on a home for sale.
10. Dead birds or animals in or around the home.

It seems that many home sellers are not overly-endowed with common sense. Closet doors falling off? Dead animals in the front yard? The pitter-patter of mousy feet in the walls? Scary Halloween decorations all over the house? These should all be no-brainers. Sending buyers away disgusted or frightened out of their wits is probably not the best of business decisions. Neither is killing or maiming them with dangerous children's toys left as booby traps.

Jon Boyd, President of NAEBA, relates some of the unbelievable things he's encountered over the years when going through homes for sale. "Once I was previewing a fairly expensive home by myself. I go into the huge basement and I can't find the light switch. As I'm reaching around

a corner I catch a light switch and turn it on. About 8 feet in front of me is a life-sized model of the ALIEN MONSTER LOOKING RIGHT AT ME! My heart starts beating again in a few minutes when I figure out what the stupid thing is, but whose idea was it to leave the thing there while the home is on the market?"

At another house Boyd almost became an unwitting participant in a Chaplinesque silent comedy. "I'm stepping into the basement the first time with buyers right behind me, again without good lighting. My foot hits something and when the light goes on I see I just barely missed stepping off the step onto a roller skate. I'm serious. Can you picture me flipping over onto my back like a cartoon character? If my foot had come down 2 inches to the left..."

Silliness aside, there is an important lesson here for home sellers. "In all these cases the buyer's attention is diverted from evaluating the home to something mildly disgusting or frustrating," says Boyd. "If sellers have a dead pigeon lying on the deck it will just help our buyers negotiate a better price because of less competition. But let's try to leave the skeletons and coffins for the Halloween party!"