

Following protocol

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Graham Ellis looks at what the RICS Surveys of residential property guidance note and Home Surveys practice notes say about drainage misconnections

The [Surveys of residential property](#) guidance note sets out a protocol (that specifically refers to drains) for undertaking different levels of survey services either in the surveyor's or company's own format, or as a standard RICS Home Survey service.

'Services

The surveyor does not perform or comment on design calculations, or test the service installations or appliances in any way. At all levels, inspection chamber covers in common areas of flats are not lifted. Additionally:

Survey level 1

The surveyor will not lift inspection chamber covers.

Survey level 2

The surveyor will lift accessible inspection chamber covers (where it is safe to do so) and visually inspect the chamber(s).

Survey level 3

The surveyor will lift accessible inspection chamber covers (where it is safe to do so) and observe the normal operation of the services in everyday use. This will be restricted where properties are empty, drained down and services disconnected. Assuming all services are connected and fully and safely functioning, "normal operation" usually includes:

- when the surveyor considers it appropriate to the assessment of the system, turning on water taps, filling and emptying sinks, baths, bidets and basins, and flushing toilets to observe the performance of visible pipework
- lifting accessible inspection chamber covers to drains and septic tanks and so on (where it is safe to do so), identifying the nature of the connections and observing water flow where a water supply is available.'

Inspecting and reporting on drains is therefore an accepted element of a Home Survey service. Although the guidance note does not specifically refer to misconnected drains, surveyors are strongly advised to take heed ? especially those undertaking Home Survey services governed by mandatory practice notes.

Home Survey levels

Condition report (CR), survey level 1

This is the most basic service. Surveyors should check the description of service in the standard terms of engagement.

As stated in the guidance note, the description of service asserts that 'inspection chamber covers to the underground drainage system are not lifted'. However, a client is told that 'if a surveyor suspects a problem, he or she should recommend a further investigation'. Surveyors must be mindful that a misconnected drain might be detected from a visual above ground inspection, which is scoped out in the checklist G6 Drainage in the CR practice note, as follows:

'Chamber covers are not lifted nor drainage systems tested. This element includes:

- traps and wastes from kitchen sinks, washing machines, dishwashers, sanitary appliances, bidets, WCs, showers, etc.
- soil and vent pipes, and the possible use of asbestos containing materials (cross refer to section J).
- stub stacks
- air admittance valves, etc.
- gullies
- rodding access points
- inspection chambers
- private drainage ? cesspit, septic tank, small sewage treatment system
- other types ? soakaway, reed beds, composting toilets
- other issues
 - ? shared drainage with neighbouring properties
 - ? permit to discharge to local watercourses, etc.

Although there is no specific mention of misconnected drains, this checklist is not exhaustive and if the surveyor sees or suspects a problem within the agreed limitations of the inspection carried out, he or she is advised to flag it up as a condition rating 3 and recommend further investigation.

HomeBuyer Report, survey level 2

A more in-depth service than the CR. One major difference is that the surveyor is expected to lift inspection chamber covers. This more extensive inspection might reveal more clues about any misconnected drains at the property.

Surveyors are advised to understand the slightly varied requirements of the description of service, which, like the CR, form part of the standard terms of engagement.

In the description of service, again a client is told that 'if a surveyor suspects a problem, he or she should recommend a further investigation'. Surveyors must be mindful that a misconnected drain might be detected from a visual above ground inspection scoped out in the checklist, under G6 Drainage:

'Chambers (except in the case of flats) are visually inspected from ground level where it is safe and reasonable for the surveyor to lift the cover(s). Neither the drains nor drainage systems are tested. This element includes:

- **Above-ground drainage**
 - ? traps and wastes from kitchen sinks, washing machines, dishwashers, sanitary appliances, bidets, WCs, showers, etc.
 - ? soil and vent pipes, and the possible use of asbestos containing materials (cross refer to section J).
 - ? stub stacks
 - ? air admittance valves, etc.
 - **Below-ground drainage**
 - ? gullies
 - ? rodding access points
 - ? inspection chambers
 - ? main drainage ? separate system (foul and surface water), combined system
 - ? private drainage ? cesspit, septic tank, small sewage treatment system
- ? other types ? soakaway, reed beds, composting toilets
- Other issues**
- ? shared drainage with neighbouring properties (cross refer to section I)
 - ? permit to discharge to local water courses, etc.
 - ? misconnected drains (see www.connectright.org.uk)
 - ? pitch fibre drainage pipes identified in inspection chambers.

Unlike the CR, misconnected drains are mentioned in the checklist. If the surveyor sees or suspects a problem within the agreed limitations of the inspection then it should be flagged up as a condition rating 3 and further investigation recommended.

Building Survey: survey level 3

The most thorough and intensive service. A higher level of inspection and reporting is required by the surveyor as outlined in the description of service and terms of engagement.

A significant difference is that the client is told that 'the surveyor makes enquiries about contamination or other environmental issues' and also that 'if a surveyor suspects a problem, he or she should recommend a further investigation'.

This will be based on a more in-depth inspection as scoped out in the checklist G6 Drainage in the BS practice note:

The surveyor opens all reasonably accessible, lightweight inspection chamber covers within the curtilage of the property. The assumed routes of the drain runs and their general condition are reported based on a visual inspection. Where a water supply is available and turned on, the surveyor may also run water through the system as part of the inspection.

The surveyor must attempt to identify the means of foul and surface water disposal. There have been recent changes to legislation with which the surveyor should be familiar before undertaking the inspection. This element includes:

- **Above-ground drainage**
 - ? traps and wastes from kitchen sinks, washing machines, dishwashers, sanitary appliances, bidets, WCs, showers, etc.
 - ? soil and vent pipes, and the possible use of asbestos containing materials (cross refer to section J)
 - ? stub stacks
 - ? air admittance valves, etc.
 - **Below-ground drainage**
 - ? gullies
 - ? rodding access points
 - ? inspection chambers
 - ? main drainage ? separate system (foul and surface water), or combined system
 - ? private drainage ? cess pit, septic tank, small sewage treatment system
 - ? other types ? soakaway, reed beds, composting toilets
- Other issues**
- ? shared drainage with neighbouring properties (cross refer to section I)
 - ? permit to discharge to local water courses, etc.
 - ? misconnected drains (see www.connectright.org.uk)
 - ? pitch fibre drainage pipes identified in inspection chambers
 - ? sustainable drainage systems.

If the property has a private drainage system, the surveyor considers the following:

- type of system
- location relative to watercourses and buildings
- capacity relative to size of current building
- pumping and piping arrangements (and access thereto)
- emptying and maintenance arrangements
- implications for replacement or repair relative to current criteria.'

The checklist specifically mentions misconnected drains so it should be flagged up as a condition rating 3 and further investigation recommended.

Conclusion

Surveyors are advised to give proper consideration to checking for misconnected drains within the agreed level of service, and report accordingly. Doing so promotes the usefulness of the chartered surveyor in the home moving and living cycle, while underlining the value to clients of having their own survey done and being made aware of any future unforeseen expenditure on remedial works, or worse.

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Further information

Related competencies include: [Pathology](#) , [Inspection](#)