

Home Buyers Glossary of Construction Terms

Your builder and the Bonded Builders Home Warranty Association know that when you start shopping for a new home, you may encounter some words and terms that are unfamiliar to you. The following glossary will help you be a better informed new home shopper.

- Aerator** - A small, removable extension at the tip of a sink faucet that mixes streaming water with air to reduce splashing and conserve water.
- Air hammer** - A banging noise in plumbing pipes caused by air infiltration.
- Airway** - The space between roof insulation and roof boards which allows for movement of air.
- Alkali** - A soluble mineral salt or mixture of salts capable of neutralizing acids.
- Anchor bolts** - Bolts that secure a wooden sill plate to a concrete or masonry floor or wall.
- Asphalt** - A residue from evaporated petroleum, insoluble in water but soluble in gasoline. Melts when heated.
- Attic ventilators** - Screened openings provided to ventilate an attic space.
- Ball cock** - A device in a flush toilet consisting of a valve connected by a lever to a floating ball. The valve closes when the ball is raised and opens when it is lowered.
- Baseboard** - A decorative and protective wood molding positioned where the wall meets the floor.
- Base molding** - Molding used to trim the upper edge of interior baseboards.
- Beam** - A structural member transversely supporting a load.
- Bearing wall** - A wall that supports any vertical load in addition to its own weight.
- Brace** - An inclined piece of framing lumber applied to wall or floor to stiffen the structure. Often used on walls as temporary bracing until framing has been completed.
- Brick veneer** - A facing of brick laid against and fastened to sheathing of a frame or tile wall.
- Casing** - Molding of various widths and thicknesses used to trim door and window openings at the jambs.
- Circuit breaker** - A switching device, located in the main electrical panel, that opens and closes electrical circuits and automatically shuts off electricity to a circuit should it become overloaded. Once the electrical load is reduced, the breaker switch can be turned back on to resume normal service.
- Concrete dusting** - A fine dust that accumulates on finished concrete surfaces.
- Condenser** - An exterior unit that is part of the air conditioning system which expels heat into the outside air.
- Conduit, electrical** - A pipe, usually metal, in which insulated electrical wire is installed.
- Corner bead** - An angled metal edging used to protect and form an edge where drywall panels meet at outside edges.
- Damper** - A device in a fireplace that controls the air draft allowed into the fire.
- Delamination** - The separation of the top piles or laminate from the base to which they are attached. In vanity and kitchen countertops, the warping or detachment of laminate material from the wood substrate.
- Dethatching** - The loosening and/or removal of matted grass and leaves from existing lawns, which allows the grass to breathe and therefore promotes healthy growth.
- Drywall** - Also known as gypsum board or sheetrock, these large sheets are attached to the wall studs and ceiling framing to construct the walls and ceiling of the home.
- Downspout** - A pipe, usually of metal, for carrying water from roof gutters.
- Dry wall** - Interior covering material, such as gypsum board or plywood, which is applied in large sheets.
- Eaves** - The margin or lower part of a roof projection over a wall.
- Efflorescence** - A white powdery substance that can form on new block, brick, or stucco finishes. It is composed of water soluble salts that are present in masonry materials and that rise to the surface via water evaporation.
- Face frame** - The front of kitchen and bathroom cabinets, to which the hinged doors attach.
- Face nailing** - Nailing through a finished, exposed surface so that the flat top of the nail head is still visible after nailing.
- Facia or fascia** - The exterior horizontal trim around rafters. Also positioned directly behind gutters and over gable trim boards.
- Filler board** - Cabinet grade wood used to fill gaps that occur between cabinets and wall openings.
- Fillers** - A wood putty used in preparation for painting to fill holes or cracks in wood.
- Flashing** - Sheet metal or other material used in roof and wall construction to protect a building from rain water penetrating the house structure.
- Flue** - A vertical duct, constructed of sheet metal or clay, that channels smoke from a fireplace out of the home.
- Footing** - A masonry section, usually concrete, in a rectangular form wider than the bottom of the foundation wall or pier it supports.
- Foundation** - The supporting portion of a structure below the first-floor construction, or below grade, including the footings.
- Frame construction** - A type of construction in which the structural parts are wood or depend upon a wood frame for support.
- Gable** - The portion of the roof above the eave line of a double-sloped roof.
- Gabled louvers** - A vent with louvers located at the peak of gable ends.
- Graphite lubricant** - A finely powdered graphite used as a lubricant.
- Ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI)** - A specialized electrical device that will interrupt electrical power where a weak electrical loss of ground occurs. Normally installed in areas where water may be present.
- Grout** - A white or colored plaster-like mortar compound used to fill spaces between ceramic tiles.
- Header** - A heavy timber and/or concrete beam that spans open spaces in walls, over doors and windows, and provides support to structural members above it.
- Hip roof** - A roof that rises by inclined planes from all four sides of a building.

- Honeycomb** - In concrete, an open cell like surface texture that occurs while pouring the concrete.
- Hose bib** - An exterior faucet connection for lawn and garden hoses.
- Insulation** - Any material high in resistance to heat transmission that, when placed in the walls, ceilings, or floors of a structure, will reduce the rate of heat flow.
- Jamb** - The side and head-lining of a doorway, window or other opening.
- Joint compound** - A plaster-like compound, used with drywall tape, to join sheets of drywall into a smooth, continuous panel.
- Joists** - The horizontal support members used in constructing a floor.
- Keeper plate** - The metal plate that keeps a door lock latch firmly in place.
- Lockset** - A door lock.
- Louver** - An opening with a series of horizontal slats so arranged as to permit ventilation but to exclude rain, sunlight or vision.
- Masonry** - Stone, brick, concrete, hollow-tile, concrete block, gypsum block or other similar building units or materials or a combination of the same, bonded together with mortar to form a wall, pier, buttress or similar mass.
- Mastic** - A construction adhesive that is thick and waterproof. Used on roofs.
- Moldings** - Shaped strips of ornamental wood used around doors and windows. Also used for base molding, tile molding, as chair rails and for exterior area molding. Moldings finish the junction of different materials or shapes.
- Nail pops** - Nails that come loose from a stud and push joint compound up. Caused by normal wood shrinkage and home settlement.
- Pointing** - The filling and finishing of broken mortar and stone cement masonry joints.
- Ponding** - The collection of water on driveways, walkways, or lawns. Ponding for excessive periods of time is indicative of grading problems.
- Rafter** - One of a series of structural members of a roof designed to support roof loads. The rafters of a flat roof are sometimes called roof joists.
- Resilient flooring** - Vinyl flooring used in areas such as kitchens, halls, bathrooms and laundry rooms. It is capable of withstanding shock without permanent deformation.
- Ridge vent** - An open vent system located along roof peaks, which in conjunction with soffit vents, creates ventilation through the passage of natural air.
- Roof sheathing** - Boards or sheet material fastened to roof rafters on which the shingles or other roof covering is laid.
- Scaling** - In concrete, the breaking away of the top surface of the concrete, caused by a freeze/thaw cycle. In painting, the flaking or peeling away of paint.
- Sheathing** - The structural covering, usually wood boards or plywood, used over studs or rafters of a structure. Structural building board is normally used only as wall sheathing.
- Shingles** - Roof covering of asphalt, asbestos, wood, tile, slate or other material cut to stock lengths, widths and thicknesses.
- Siding** - The finish covering the outside walls of a frame building, whether made of horizontal weatherboards, vertical boards with battens, shingles or other material.
- Sill** - The lowest member of the frame of a structure, resting on the foundation and supporting the floor joists or the uprights of a wall. The member forming the lower side of an opening, as a door-sill or window-sill.
- Sill plates** - A support member laid on the top of the foundation wall that serves as a base for the wall framing.
- Silicone** - A synthetic lubricating compound with high resistance to temperature change and water. When added to caulking, it extends elasticity properties and increases the life of the caulking.
- Soffit** - Usually the underside of an overhanging cornice or roof.
- Soffit vent** - A vent located under the ceiling of a roof overhang.
- Spackle** - See joint compound.
- Spalling** - Flaking or chipping of stone or other masonry material. Similar to scaling, but the chips and flakes are larger.
- Stud** - One of a series of slender wood or metal vertical structural members placed as supporting elements in walls and partitions.
- Sub-flooring** - A wood sheet flooring directly over the joists that supports the underlayment or floor covering.
- Swale** - The soil contour on a building lot deliberately shaped to channel rain water away from the home.
- Tack strips** - A wood strip with exposed tack points that is attached to the sub-flooring and holds stretched wall-to-wall carpeting in position.
- Tread** - The horizontal board in a stairway on which the foot is placed.
- Trim** - The finish materials in a building, such as moldings, applied around openings or at the floor and ceilings of rooms.
- Trusses** - Engineered wood structural members used to construct floors and roofs.
- Turnaround** - An additional section of driveway where cars can be turned around.
- Underlayment** - A flooring layer over the base subflooring, over which tile or resilient floor covering is laid.
- Valley** - The internal angle formed by the junction of two sloping sides of a roof.
- Vacuum breaker** - Also called a back-flow preventer, this device is placed on exterior faucets to allow water to only flow out of the home.
- Valve seat** - An interior part of the faucet valve assembly where the valve rests.
- Wall ties** - The metal pieces that tie masonry veneer to the frame of the home, or, when pouring concrete, the metal pieces that hold concrete foundation wall forms in place until the concrete cures.
- Washers** - Round, rigid rubber or plastic discs used as a sealing device in water faucet valves.
- Weather stripping** - A weather insulating strip of material placed around doors and windows to reduce water entry into the home. Also reduces air infiltration into the home or the escape of conditioned air out of the home.
- Washouts** - An area where water has produced soil erosion.
- Window balance** - A counter balance device in window housings that assists with the opening and closing of a window, and then keeps the window in position.