South Africa Standards of Practice for the Inspection of Residential Properties

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I. DEFINITIONS and SCOPE

A. A **Home Inspection** is a non-invasive, visual examination of a residential dwelling, performed for a fee, which is designed to identify observed material defects in-home systems and their major components, and safety hazards within the said dwelling. Components may include any combination of mechanical, structural, electrical, plumbing, or other essential systems or portions of the home, as identified and agreed to by the Client and Inspector before the inspection process.

1. The inspection is based on observations of the visible and apparent condition of the home systems and their major components at the time of the inspection and does not include the prediction of future conditions.

2. A home inspection will not reveal every concern that exists or ever could exist, but only those material defects observed on the day of the inspection.
3. A home inspection can include a survey and/or analysis of energy flows and usage in a residential property if agreed to by the inspector and client.

B. A **material defect** is a condition of a residential real property or any portion of it, that would have a significant, adverse impact on the value of the real property, or that involves an unreasonable risk to people on the property. The fact that a structural element, a home system or a component is near, at or beyond the end of its normal useful life is not, by itself, a material defect.

C. The Home Inspection shall result in an **inspection report**, which shall identify and describe, in written format, the inspected systems, structures and components of the dwelling, and shall identify material defects observed. Inspection reports may contain recommendations regarding conditions reported or recommendations for correction, monitoring or further evaluation by professionals, but this is not required.

II. LIMITATIONS, EXCEPTIONS, and EXCLUSIONS

A. Limitations

1. An inspection is not technically exhaustive.
2. An inspection does not include the use of invasive measures.
3. An inspection will not identify concealed defects.
4. An inspection might not identify latent defects.
5. An inspection will not deal with aesthetic concerns or what could be deemed matters of taste, cosmetic defects etc.
6. An inspection will not determine the suitability of the property for any use.
7. An inspection does not determine the market value of the property or its marketability.
8. An inspection does not determine the insurability of the property.
9. An inspection does not determine the advisability or inadvisability of the purchase of the inspected property.
10. An inspection does not determine the life expectancy of the property or any components or systems therein.
11. An inspection does not include items not permanently installed.
12. These Standards of Practice apply only to structures containing four or fewer physically connected dwelling units.

B. Exceptions and Exclusions

1. **The inspector is not required to inspect:**

    a. Landscaping, including:

        i. condition or placement of flora.

        ii. any landscape irrigation systems.

    b. Fire suppression systems.

    c. Natural gas or Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) systems include:

        i. storage tanks and components.

        ii. distribution or supply pipes, fittings or controls; or

        iii. gas-fired appliances.

2. **The inspector is not required to determine:**

    a. Property boundary lines or encroachments.

    b. The condition of any component or system that is not readily accessible.

    c. The condition of any system or component buried underground.

    d. The condition of any system or component that is not readily visible.

    e. Soil composition or its adequacy for any purpose including building.

    f. The service life expectancy of any component or system.

    g. The size, capacity, BTU, performance or efficiency of any component or system.

    h. The cause of, or reason for, any condition.

    i. The cause for the need for repair or replacement of any system or component.

    j. Future conditions.

    k. Compliance with any codes or regulations.

    l. The presence of evidence of infestations by rodents, animals, or wood-destroying insects.

    m. The presence, levels or species of mould fungi.

    n. The presence of airborne hazards.

    o. The presence of toxic materials or materials that may emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

    p. The presence of unwanted birds, insects, reptiles or mammals.

    q. The presence of pathogenic microbes.

    r. The presence of other flora or fauna.

    s. The outdoor or indoor air quality.

    t. The presence of asbestos.

    u. The presence of an environmental hazard.

    v. The presence of electromagnetic fields.

w. The presence of hazardous materials includes but is not limited to, the presence of lead in paint.

x. Any hazardous waste conditions.

y. Any manufacturer's recalls or conformance with manufacturer installation, or any information included for consumer protection purposes.

z. The acoustical properties of any system.

3. The inspector is not required to provide estimates for:

a. The cost to operate or maintain any given system.

b. The cost to correct or repair any defective condition.

4. The inspector is not required to operate:

a. Any system that is shut down.

b. Any system that does not function properly.

c. Any system that does not turn on with the use of normal operating controls.

d. Any shut-off valves or manual stop valves.

e. Any electrical disconnect or over-current protection devices.

f. Any alarm systems.

g. Moisture meters, thermal imaging (infrared) cameras, combustible gas detectors, carbon monoxide analysers, or similar equipment.

5. The inspector is not required to:

a. Move any personal items or other obstructions, such as, but not limited to:

i. floor or wall coverings.

ii. throw rugs.

i. ceiling tiles.

ii. window coverings.

iii. equipment.

iv. plants.

v. ice.

vi. debris

vii. snow

viii. water.

ix. dirt.

x. foliage; or

xi. pets.

b. Dismantle, open or uncover any system or components.
c. Enter or access any area that may, in the opinion of the inspector, be unsafe or not readily accessible.
d. Inspect underground items such as, but not limited to, underground storage tanks or indications of their presence, whether abandoned or actively used.
e. Inspect decorative items.
f. Inspect common elements or areas in multi-unit housing.
g. Inspect intercoms, speaker systems, security devices, or landscape irrigation systems.
h. Inspect any system or component which is not included in these Standards.
i. Offer guarantees or warranties.
j. Offer or perform any engineering services.
k. Offer or perform any trade or professional service other than home inspection.
l. Research the history of the property; report on its potential for alteration, modification, extendibility or suitability for specific or proposed use for occupancy.
m. Determine the age of construction or installation of any system structure or component of a building, or differentiate between original construction and subsequent additions, improvements, renovations or replacements.
n. Determine the insurability of a property.
o. Do anything which, in the inspector's opinion, is likely to be unsafe or dangerous to the inspector or others, or damage property, such as, but not limited to: walking on roof surfaces, climbing ladders, entering attic spaces, or negotiating with pets.

III. Standards of Practice

A. Roof

1. **The inspector shall inspect from ground level, windows or eaves, and report on the condition of:**
   a. the primary roof-covering material.
   b. the gutters.
   c. the downpipes.
   d. the vents, flashings, skylights, chimney and other roof penetrations; and
   e. The general structure of the roof

2. **The inspector is not required to:**

    f. Walk on any pitched roof surface.

    g. Walk on any roof areas that appear, in the opinion of the inspector, to be unsafe.

    h. Walk on any roof areas if it might, in the opinion of the inspector, cause damage.

    i. Inspect underground roof drainage pipes.

    j. Inspect antennae, lightning arresters, de-icing equipment, or similar attachments.

    k. Identify the composition of the roof covering material.

    l. Predict the service life expectancy.

    m. Remove snow, ice, debris or other conditions that prohibit the observation of the roof surfaces.

    n. Move insulation.

    o. Perform a water test.

    p. Warrant or certify the roof.

    q. Confirm proper fastening.

B. Exterior Inspection

1. **The inspector shall inspect:**

    a. describe, and report on the condition of the exterior wall covering.

    b. and report on the condition of the siding, flashing and trim.

    c. and report on the condition of all door and window exteriors, decks, stoops, steps, stairs, porches, handrail assemblies, balustrades, and guardrails, eaves, soffits and fascia.

    d. and report on the condition of the vegetation, surface drainage, and retaining walls when these are likely to adversely affect the structure.

    e. and report as a potential safety hazard any spacing between intermediate balusters, spindles and rails for steps, stairways, balustrades, balconies or railings that exceeds modern safety standards.

    f. and report on the presence of a visible damp-proof course.

2. **The inspector is not required to:**

    a. Evaluate trees or landscaping.

    a. Inspect or operate screens, storm windows, shutters, awnings, or exterior accent lighting.

    b. Inspect fences or outbuildings.

    c. Inspect items, including window and door flashing that are not visible or readily accessible from the ground.

    d. Inspect recreational facilities or playground equipment.

    e. Inspect seawalls or docks.

f. Inspect erosion-control or earth-stabilization measures.

g. Inspect for safety type glass.

h. Inspect underground utilities.

i. Inspect underground items.

j. Inspect components of private water supply (bore) or springs.

k. Inspect solar, wind or geothermal systems.

l. Inspect swimming pools or spas.

m. Inspect components of private onsite wastewater (septic) systems

n. Inspect landscape irrigation systems.

o. Inspect drain fields or dry wells.

p. Determine the integrity of the thermal window seals or damaged glass.

q. Identify geological, geotechnical, hydrological or soil conditions.

C. Cellar, Foundation, Under-floor Space & Structure

1. **The inspector shall inspect:**

   a. the cellar and any safely accessible under-floor spaces.

   b. and report on the location of the cellar or other under-floor access openings.

   c. and report on any condition that may represent a structural or safety concern.

   d. and report any present condition or clear indications of past moisture intrusion or leakage.

   e. and report any general indications of foundation movement, such as but not limited to cracks in interior or exterior wall coverings or concrete foundations, out-of-square door frames, or sloped floors.

2. **The inspector is not required to:**

   a. Enter any under-floor areas that are not readily accessible or where entry could cause damage or pose a hazard to the inspector.

   b. Move stored items or debris.

   c. Operate sump pumps with inaccessible floats.

   d. Identify improper size, spacing, span, location or determine the adequacy of foundation bolting, bracing, joists, joist spans or support systems.

   e. Provide any engineering or architectural service.

   f. Report on the adequacy of any structural system or component.

D. Heating

1. **The inspector shall inspect:**

a. Identify the type of heating system installed.

b. Identify the type of fuel used by the home heating system.

c. Operate the heating system, using normal operating controls.

d. Report as in need of repair heating systems that do not respond to the controls.

e. Report if the heating systems are deemed inaccessible.

2. The inspector is not required to:

a. Inspect or evaluate the interior of flues or chimneys, fire chambers, heat exchangers, combustion air systems, fresh air intakes, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, electronic air filters, geothermal systems, or solar heating systems.

b. Inspect fuel tanks or underground or concealed fuel supply systems.

c. Determine the uniformity, temperature, flow, balance, distribution, size, capacity, BTU, or supply adequacy of the heating system.

d. Light or ignite pilot flames.

e. Activate heating, heat pump systems or other heating systems when ambient temperatures or other circumstances are not conducive to safe operation or may damage the equipment.

f. Override electronic thermostats.

g. Evaluate fuel quality.

h. Verify thermostat calibration, heat anticipation, or automatic setbacks, timers, programs or clocks.

E. Fireplace

1. The inspector shall inspect:

a. and report on the condition of the fireplace, including the:

i. firebox

ii. proper operation of the damper, if readily accessible.

iii. the condition of the hearth; and

iv. for adequate clearance from the firebox to combustibles.

2. The inspector is not required to:

a. Inspect the flue or vent system.

b. Inspect the interior of chimneys or flues, fire doors or screens, seals or gaskets, or mantels.

c. Determine the need for a chimney sweep.

d. Operate gas fireplace inserts.

e. Light pilot flames.

f. Determine the appropriateness of any installation.

g. Inspect automatic fuel-feed devices.

h. Inspect combustion and/or make-up air devices.

i. Inspect heat-distribution devices, whether gravity-controlled or fan-assisted.

j. Ignite or extinguish fires.

k. Determine the adequacy of drafts or draft characteristics.

l. Move fireplace inserts or firebox contents.

m. Perform a smoke test.

n. Dismantle or remove any component.

F. Cooling

1. **The inspector shall:**

   a. Identify the type of cooling system installed.

   b. Operate the cooling equipment using normal operating controls.

2. **The inspector is not required to:**

   a. Determine the uniformity, temperature, flow, balance, distribution, size, capacity, BTU, or supply adequacy of the cooling system.

   b. Determine proper condition of electrical current, coolant fluids or gases, or presence of coolant leakage.

   c. Inspect window-mounted air conditioning units.

   d. Operate equipment or systems if the exterior temperature is below 18 degrees Celsius, or when other circumstances are not conducive to safe operation or may damage the equipment.

   e. Inspect or determine thermostat calibration, cooling anticipation, or automatic setbacks or clocks.

G. Electrical

1. **The inspector is required to visually inspect and report on:**

   a. the general condition of the main and any sub-boards including.

      i. the main service breaker.

      ii. over-current protection devices (circuit breakers and fuses).

      iii. adequate labelling of the circuit breakers.

      iv. any unused circuit-breaker panel opening that was not filled.

   b. visible branch wiring.

2. **The inspector is required to inspect and test:**

   a. a representative number of switches and lighting fixtures.

   b. all accessible plug points using an earth leakage circuit breaker (ELCB) socket tester.

c. all earth leakage circuit breakers (ELCBs) using the test button and ELCB tester, where possible; and

d. for the presence of smoke detectors in timber-framed buildings.

3. **The inspector shall report as in need of correction any tested switch or plug point where:**

a. power was not present.

b. the cover was not in place.

c. it was not secured to the wall.

d. evidence of arcing or excessive heat was observed.

e. the plug point was not grounded; and

f. the polarity was incorrect.

4. **The inspector is not required to inspect:**

a. electrical systems that include:

i. service cables.

ii. meters.

iii. switchboards or their components.

iv. hidden electrical components:

v. low-voltage electrical systems such as, but not limited to:

i. phone lines.

ii. cable lines.

iii. antennae.

iv. lights.

v. remote controls.

g. security, fire or alarm systems

b. exterior lighting.

c. any electrical systems or branch circuits that are not energized.

d. private or emergency electrical supply sources, including, but not limited to generators, windmills, photovoltaic solar collectors, or battery or electrical storage facility

H. Plumbing

1. **The inspector shall:**

a. Identify the water supply as public or private.

b. Describe the visual condition of the primary water supply and gas shut-off valves, as well as describe their location.

c. Inspect the water distribution system, including:

i. Identifying the location of the main water shut-off valve and its visible condition.

ii. Visible distribution pipes and identify as a potential health hazard any lead water supply pipes.

iii. All taps, fixtures and faucets for proper installation, operation and condition.

iv. Water supply functional flow.

v. The condition and proper operation of mechanical drain stops in sinks, basins and baths.

vi. Plumbing fixtures for functional drainage.

d. Inspect the accessible, visible, drain, waste, and vent systems for functional drainage, operation and configuration.

e. Inspect the water heating equipment, including:

i. Venting.

ii. Distribution pipe connections.

iii. Identification of the energy source; and

iv. verification of the presence or absence of temperature-pressure relief (TPR) valves and properly terminated TPR discharge pipe.

f. Inspect and test accessible sump pumps.

g. Inspect, flush and report as in need of repair toilets that:

h. Have loose tanks or are loose at the floor.

i. Have cracks in the ceramic material.

j. Leak; or

k. Have tank components that do not operate as designed; and

l. Describe any visible fuel storage systems.

2. **The inspector is not required to:**

a. Inspect:

i. The interior of flues or chimneys.

ii. A water softener or filtering system.

iii. Bore pumps or tanks.

iv. Floor drains.

v. Landscape irrigation systems; or

vi. Fire suppression systems.

b. Inspect, test or evaluate private onsite wastewater and sewage treatment (septic) systems or their components.

c. Inspect, test or evaluate the condition performance of any private water supply (bore) or springs or related equipment.

d. Inspect storage or distribution components for natural gas or Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG).

e. Inspect any underground or concealed fuel supply systems.

f. Inspect or evaluate water treatment systems or water filters.

g. Inspect water storage tanks, pressure pumps or bladder tanks.

h. Inspect, test or evaluate ancillary systems or components, such as, but not limited to, those related to:

   i. Solar water heating; or

   ii. Hot water re-circulation.

i. Inspect clothes washing machines or their connections.

j. inspect natural gas, LPG or any other type of fuel storage tanks.

k. Determine the age, life expectancy, temperature or size adequacy of the water heater.

l. Determine with accuracy the flow rate, volume, pressure, temperature or adequacy of the water supply.

m. Determine the water quality, potability or reliability of the water supply or source.

n. Determine the presence or effectiveness of anti-siphon, back-flow prevention or drain-stop.

o. Determine whether there are sufficient cleanouts for effective cleaning of drainpipes.

p. Determine the adequacy of combustion air supply.

q. Evaluate for any compliance with local, territorial, or state conservation or energy standards, or the proper design or sizing of any water supply, waste or venting components, fixtures or piping.

r. Evaluate wait-time to obtain hot water at fixtures or perform testing of any kind to water heater elements.

s. Evaluate or determine the adequacy of combustion air.

t. Test, operate, open or close safety controls, manual stop valves and/or temperature/pressure relief valves.

u. Test shower pans, tub and shower surrounds or enclosures for leakage.

v. Open sealed plumbing access panels.

w. Operate any primary or under-counter water or gas valve.

x. Light or ignite pilot flames.

I. Roof Space & Insulation

1. **The inspector shall inspect**:

   a. and report on the general absence or lack of insulation in unfinished spaces.

   b. the visible home structure.

2. **The inspector is not required to:**

a. Enter the roof space or any unfinished spaces that are not readily accessible, or where, in his or her opinion, entry could cause damage or pose a safety hazard to the inspector.
b. Move, touch or disturb insulation.
c. Move, touch or disturb vapour retarders.
d. Break or otherwise damage the surface finish or weather seal on or around access panels or covers.
e. Identify the composition or exact R-value of insulation material.
f. Determine the types of materials used in insulation or wrapping of pipes, ducts, jackets, boilers or wiring.

J. Doors, Windows & Interior

1. The inspector shall:

a. Open and close a representative number of doors and windows.
b. and report on damaged or inoperable hardware.
c. Inspect the walls, ceilings, steps, stairways, handrails and guardrails.
d. and report as being a potential safety hazard any spacing between balusters, spindles and treads that fails to comply with modern safety standards.
e. and report as in need of repair or replacement any double-pane windows that display obvious visible evidence of seal failure.
f. Inspect the following garage door components:
    i. Garage door openers by operating the installed automatic overhead door control.
    ii. Operate the automatic overhead door opener manual disconnect.
    iii. Overhead door support structure.
    iv. Any installed safety photo-electric sensors controlling automatic stop or reverse; and
    v. Placement of activation switches.

2. The inspector is not required to:

a. Inspect paint, wallpaper, and window treatments or finish treatments.
b. Inspect central vacuum systems.
c. Inspect safety glazing.
d. Inspect security systems or components.
e. Evaluate the fastening of countertops, cabinets, sink tops or fixtures.
f. Move furniture, stored items, or any coverings, such as carpets or rugs, to inspect the concealed floor structure.
g. Move suspended ceiling tiles.

h. Inspect or move any household appliances.

i. Inspect or operate equipment housed in the garage, except as otherwise noted.

j. Verify or certify the safe operation of any pressure-activated auto-reverse or related safety function of a garage door.

k. Operate or evaluate any security bar release and opening mechanisms, whether interior or exterior, including their compliance with local, state or federal standards.

l. Operate any system, appliance or component that requires the use of special keys, codes, combinations or devices.

m. Operate or evaluate self-cleaning oven cycles, tilt guards/latches, or signal lights.

n. Inspect microwave ovens or test leakage from microwave ovens.

o. Operate or examine any sauna, steam jenny, kiln, toaster, ice maker, coffee maker, can opener, bread warmer, blender, instant hot-water dispenser, or other small, ancillary devices.

p. Inspect elevators.

q. Inspect remote controls.

r. Inspect appliances.

s. Inspect items not permanently installed.

t. Examine or operate any above-ground, movable, freestanding, or otherwise non-permanently installed pool, spa, recreational equipment or self-contained equipment.

u. Come into contact with any pool or spa water to determine the system's structure or components.

v. Determine the adequacy of spa jet water's force or bubble effect.

w. Determine the structural integrity or leakage of a pool or spa.

IV. Glossary of Terms

- **accessible:** Can be approached or entered by the inspector safely, without difficulty, fear or danger.
- **activate:** To turn on, supply power, or enable systems, equipment or devices to become active by normal operating controls. Examples include turning on the gas or water supply valves to the fixtures and appliances and activating electrical breakers or fuses.
- **adversely affect:** To constitute, or potentially constitute, a negative or destructive impact.
- **alarm system:** Warning devices, installed or freestanding, including, but not limited to: carbon monoxide detectors, flue gas and other spillage detectors, security equipment, ejector pumps, and smoke alarms.
- **appliance:** A household device operated using electricity or gas. Not included in this definition are components covered under central heating, central cooling or plumbing.
- **architectural service:** Any practice involving the art and science of building design for the construction of any structure or grouping of structures, and the use of space within and surrounding the structures or the design, design development, preparation of construction contract documents, and administration of the construction contract.
- **component:** A permanently installed or attached fixture, element or part of a system.
- **condition:** The visible and conspicuous state of being of an object.

- **crawlspace:** The area within the confines of the foundation and between the ground and the underside of the lowest floor's structural component.
- **decorative:** Ornamental; not required for the operation of essential systems or components of a home.
- **describe:** To report in writing a system or component by its type or other observed characteristics to distinguish it from other components used for the same purpose.
- **determine:** To arrive at an opinion or conclusion according to examination.
- **dismantle:** To open, take apart or remove any component, device or piece that would not typically be opened, taken apart or removed by an ordinary occupant.
- **engineering service:** Any professional service or creative work requiring engineering education, training and experience, and the application of special knowledge of the mathematical, physical and engineering sciences to such professional service or creative work as consultation, investigation, evaluation, planning, design and supervision of construction to assure compliance with the specifications and design, in conjunction with structures, buildings, machines, equipment, works or processes.
- **enter:** To go into an area to observe visible components.
- **evaluate:** To assess the systems, structures and/or components of a dwelling.
- **examine:** to visually look (see **inspect**).
- **foundation:** The base upon which the structure or wall rests; usually masonry, concrete or stone, and generally partially underground.
- **function:** The action for which an item, component or system is specially fitted or used, or for which an item, component or system exists; to be in action or perform a task.
- **functional:** Performing, or able to perform, a function.
- **home inspection:** The process by which an inspector visually examines the readily accessible systems and components of a home and operates those systems and components utilizing these Standards of Practice as a guideline.
- **household appliances:** Kitchen and laundry appliances, room air conditioners, and similar appliances.
- **inspect:** To visually look at readily accessible systems and components safely, using normal operating controls, and accessing readily accessible panels and areas, per these Standards of Practice.
- **inspected property:** The readily accessible areas of the buildings, site, items, components and systems included in the inspection.
- **inspector:** One who performs a real estate inspection.
- **installed:** Attached or connected such that the installed item requires a tool for removal.
- **Invasive measures:** Are intentional actions that result in damage to systems, components or materials.
- **Latent defect:** This is a fault in the property that could not have been discovered by a reasonably thorough inspection before the sale.
- **material defect:** A condition of a residential real property or any portion of it that would have a significant adverse impact on the value of the real property or that involves an unreasonable risk to people on the property. The fact that a structural element, system or subsystem is near, at or beyond the end of its normal useful life is not, by itself, a material defect.
- **normal operating controls:** Devices, such as thermostats, that would be operated by ordinary occupants which require no specialized skill or knowledge.
- **observe:** To see through visually directed attention.

- **operate:** To cause systems to function or turn on with normal operating controls.
- **readily accessible:** An item or component that is, in the judgment of the inspector, capable of being safely observed without the removal of obstacles, detachment or disengagement of connecting or securing devices, or other unsafe or difficult procedures to gain access.
- **recreational facilities:** Spas, saunas, steam baths, swimming pools, tennis courts, playground equipment, and other exercises, entertainment and athletic facilities.
- **report:** A written communication (possibly including images) of any material defects observed during the inspection.
- **representative number:** Enough to serve as a typical or characteristic example of the item(s) inspected.
- **safety glazing:** Tempered glass, laminated glass, or rigid plastic.
- **shut down:** Turned off, unplugged, inactive, not in service, not operational, etc.
- **structural component:** A component that supports non-variable forces or weights (dead loads) and variable forces or weights (live loads).
- **system:** An assembly of various components which function.
- **technically exhaustive:** A comprehensive and detailed examination beyond the scope of a real estate home inspection that would involve or include, but would not be limited to dismantling, specialized knowledge or training, special equipment, measurements, calculations, testing, research, analysis, or other means.
- **unsafe:** A condition in a system or component that is judged to be a significant risk of personal injury during normal, day-to-day use. The risk may be due to damage, deterioration, improper installation, or a change in accepted residential construction standards.
- **verify:** To confirm or substantiate.