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Energy-Efficient Home Certifications

When looking for an energy-efficient home, it's helpful to know about the different certification systems that exist. Here's a breakdown:

- **RESNET** – The Residential Energy Services Network sets the standards for energy efficiency ratings and certifies contractors. They oversee the HERS index (see below).
- **HERS Index** – The Home Energy Rating System measures a home's energy efficiency. A score of 100 is average, and a lower score (e.g., 70) means the home uses less energy. A score higher than 100 means the home uses more energy than average.
- **LEED** – The U.S. Green Building Council gives LEED certifications based on a home's environmental friendliness. The highest certification is "LEED Platinum," awarded for meeting high standards in areas like air quality and water efficiency.
- **Energy Star** – This certification, overseen by the EPA, is for products like refrigerators, light bulbs, and homes. Homes can earn this label after an independent inspection confirms they meet energy efficiency standards.
- **Indoor airPLUS** – Also run by the EPA, this label is given to homes that go above and beyond Energy Star by adding extra features to control moisture, mold, pests, and pollutants.
- **National Green Building Certification** – Managed by the National Association of Home Builders, this program certifies homes with different levels of sustainability: bronze, silver, gold, and emerald. Emerald is the highest level, requiring energy savings of 60% or more.

Potential Hazards a Home Inspector Might Find

- **Radon** – A colorless, odorless gas that seeps into homes from the ground, radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

What to look for: Basements and lower levels with ground contact are common entry points. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides maps of high-risk areas. A radon test can confirm if levels are elevated.

- **Asbestos** – Once widely used for fire-resistant insulation, asbestos was banned in 1985 but can still be found in older homes. If disturbed, its fibers can become airborne and cause serious respiratory illnesses.

What to look for: Homes built before 1985 may contain asbestos in insulation, floor tiles, roofing, or siding. Remodeling can release asbestos into the air, so testing is recommended before disturbing these materials.

- **Lead** – A toxic metal once used in paint, pipes, and household products, lead exposure can cause serious health issues, particularly in children.

What to look for: Homes built before 1978 may have lead-based paint or lead pipes. Peeling or chipping paint is a red flag. Buyers of older homes seeking HUD-insured loans must provide certification that the home is lead-safe.

- **Other Hazardous Materials** – Household chemicals like paint solvents, pesticides, fertilizers, and motor oils can pose fire hazards or cause serious health issues if improperly stored.

What to look for: Check garages, sheds, crawl spaces, and basements for hazardous materials. If found, request proper disposal and obtain a disposal certificate before closing.

- **Groundwater Contamination** – Improper disposal of hazardous chemicals can seep into the soil and contaminate water supplies. Leaking underground oil tanks or septic systems can also contribute to contamination.

What to look for: Homes near industrial areas or previously used commercial sites may be at higher risk. Consider a water test if contamination is a concern.