

How Long Will It Last? The Life of a Home's Key Components

Just like the human body, your home is made of parts, all working in unison, many unseen and ignored during the course of your daily life. From the roof to the foundation, and from the front door to the back, a home consists of literally thousands of components.

Ideally, these components might all have an unlimited life expectancy. But given the realities of day-to-day use, how long can a home owner reasonably expect a home component such as a window or roof to last?

A new study conducted by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and sponsored by Bank of America Home Equity provides insight into the life expectancies of a number of products in the home.

The study intentionally overlooked consumer preferences, acknowledging that if they were considered, kitchen counters would be replaced long before the end of their useful life, and rooms may be repainted only once in 50 years.

Other factors that can have a significant effect on life expectancy include maintenance, proper installation, the level of use and the quality of the materials. And some components, while remaining functional, become obsolete due to changing technology or improvements.

Insulation

According to the study, all types of insulation can be expected to last a lifetime if they are properly installed and are not punctured, cut, burned or exposed to ultraviolet rays and are kept dry. Proper installation not only extends the lifetime of your insulation, it also ensures that it will perform properly, resulting in reduced energy use and expenses, as well as increased home comfort.

Windows

Windows, because they can be exposed to extreme weather conditions, have a much shorter life expectancy. The study, which polled experts in the various fields, found that aluminum windows can reasonably be expected to last 15 to 20 years and wooden windows can last upwards of 30 years. An important element of maintaining your windows is the window glazing – the putty that secures the glass to the sash. Over time, this glazing can crack, resulting in drafty and loose panes. Available at any hardware store, glazing can be replaced by simply chipping or scraping off the old putty, cleaning the window thoroughly and installing new glazing with a putty knife or caulking gun. Some types of glazing require a coat of latex paint for weatherproofing.

Roofs

Like windows, the life expectancy of a roof depends on local weather conditions as well as appropriate maintenance and quality of the materials. Slate, copper and clay/concrete roofs can be expected to last more than 50 years. Roofs made of asphalt shingles should last for about 20 years; fiber cement shingles should last about 25 years; and wood shakes for about 30 years. In regards to roof maintenance, it's important to be proactive to prevent emergency and expensive repairs. Look for damaged or loose shingles; gaps in the flashing where the roofing and siding meet vents and flues; and damaged mortar around the chimney (especially at the joints, caps and washes). If you see any signs of damage, call a professional to repair it.

Paint

Although some avid decorators may repaint every six months, homes usually need to be painted every five to 10 years depending on the content of the paint (its glossiness), its exposure to moisture and traffic. Quality paints are expected to last upwards of 20 years. Exterior paint conditions should be regularly monitored in order to catch problems early on. Assessing paint for dirt, mold, cracking, peeling, fading and rusting—and repairing immediately, usually through simple cleaning methods such as scrubbing or power washing—can end up saving homeowners much more costly repainting jobs in the long term.

Remember, these numbers are averages, with usage, weather, maintenance and a number of other factors influencing life expectancy. Chances are, changing trends will dictate a shorter life span, as homeowners update and remodel their homes.

