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# Garage Safety

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## Garage Safety

*By: Patrick Breen*

Before this Autumn season ends, and your summer toys and lawn care tools get packed away for the winter, take the time to review the safety of your attached garage. If you are like most people your garage becomes a catch all, stuffed to the brim, leaving just enough room for one small vehicle.

The nature of these conditions, coupled with the fact that this highly volatile storage closet is attached to your home is why, as a home inspector, I pay close attention to the condition of your garage.

One of the first things I look for is that the entry door into the living space has a self-closing mechanism attached. The most common type used is spring wound hinges. These hinges can be wound so the door will automatically close behind you. This is a safety feature protecting against Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's) entering your home; as well as to keep fire contained inside your garage long enough to allow you and your family time to escape.

This door needs to be a solid wood door no less than 1 3/8" thick; a solid or honey comb-core steel door not less than 1 3/8" thick; or a 20 minute rated door. If the door has a glass window it needs to be fire rated. If a pet door is installed the integrity of this fire barrier is lost. Also, check to make sure the seals around the door are tight.

Because a garage often contains flammable liquids such as solvents, paints, gas cans, and due to the fact that vehicles can leak gas and oil, it is important to eliminate all wall penetrations into the house. Dryer vents should terminate on the exterior. If you have one that vents into the garage it can easily allow the spread of flames into the living space and should be re-routed.

It is for this reason that the common wall to your home needs to be completely covered with at least 1/2" gypsum board with the seams taped. Garages beneath living spaces need to have at least 5/8" gypsum board on the ceiling, and if your garage is 3 feet or less from your home the wall closest to your home needs to have this gypsum barrier.

The vapors from VOC's are heavier than air and will gravitate to the floor. This is why most garages are at least one step down from the home entry. For this reason, if you have a hot water heater in your garage, it needs to be elevated at least 18" off the floor so the pilot light or ignition system is above any vapors. For electrical safety, while possibly working around standing water, make sure your outlets are Ground Fault Circuit protected by a GFCI outlet.

If your main electrical panel is located in your garage remember you may need quick access to shut power off. Leave at least 36" of clearance while packing things away, but keep in mind where we live and be sure to keep that snow shovel handy.