

# COMMON FOUNDATIONS

Volume 6  
August/September 2006

© 2006 CRITERIUM ENGINEERS

## Is Your Community Dressed for Success?

**H**ave you ever driven by a community and instinctively known its residents take great pride in where they live? The homes are all in excellent shape, with attractive landscaping and complementary exterior finishes on every one. The roads are free of litter and freshly paved, and the common grassy areas are neatly mowed with bright flowers dotting the perimeter.

The elusive “curb appeal” escapes many associations, particularly the more mature neighborhoods. Aside from the aesthetic pleasure derived from living in an attractive community, maintaining exterior finishes to the highest degree possible can also benefit your association’s bank account. Maintenance plans will be easier to follow, and with proper upkeep, common elements will have a longer remaining useful life. Property values may rise, especially when prospective homebuyers shop around and deem your community to be the best.

The key to beautifying your community is to set the best example for your residents – and then expect them to follow suit. Cast a critical and objective eye at your association: what are your strong points? And where are you lacking?

It can be difficult to objectively assess the state of your neighborhood, as you’ve grown accustomed to seeing it every day. The trick is to find the areas where improvement is most needed, and work with your residents and contractors to make sure they happen.

Approach the neighborhood with fresh eyes—Park and walk through the streets as if you were house hunting for your own family. What general clean-up items need to be taken care of? Make sure residents remove toys, bikes, and other clutter from the sidewalks and roadways. The common areas should be well-lit and well-kept—keep a sharp eye out for lawn tools or other untidiness.

Spruce up—Landscaping is perhaps the most visually significant element of a community. Brightly colored flowers in the foreground make a house look lively; consider planting flowers in the pathways and entrance area. A well-manicured lawn is worth the cost of a professional landscaping crew. Large, leafy trees convey a sense of majesty and make excellent focal points. Also, request that your landscaper edge sidewalks and remove overspilling vegetation for a “cleaner” look.



Paint—Nothing detracts from a home’s beauty like peeling paint or cracked siding. Though relatively expensive, a new coat of paint on each building will immediately transform the look of your community. Consult your reserve study and consider moving painting to the top of your to-do list.

Focus on small details—Seemingly minor features in a community can make a huge difference. A bubbling fountain in the grassy entrance area or a stoned cobblestone walkway will add small touches of elegance. Well-placed small fences and arches in a garden are also pleasing to the eye and add character to an otherwise drab grassy area.

Let there be light—Outdoor lighting is very effective at highlighting the best features of your neighborhood. Inset-lit walkways and attractive front porch lighting create quite a dramatic effect, and are also important safety measures.

Don’t forget the rear view!—Enlist the help of homeowners in keeping backyards as tidy as the front. Clean decks and a trimmed lawn show a pride in their home that will spill over to the community as a whole. Your association should look into renting one pressure-washer for everyone to use on their decks, patios, and sidewalks.

### **Encouraging Community Cleaning**

Involve all the residents in the clean-up effort!

- Common areas should set the standard for individual homes. Make sure the landscaping is neatly trimmed and the grass is always mowed.
- Communicate the association’s expectations in a newsletter or bulletin board post first. This sets the ground rules for consistent enforcement of the CC&R’s.
- Sponsor monthly “Best Home” contests, with the prize being a shrub or tree to complement the rest of the landscaping.
- Organize community clean-up days, complete with a barbecue.

# Five Safety Hazards in Older Communities

Older homes are often revered as a source of classic beauty and fine craftsmanship, making them an attractive option for many homebuyers. However, the decorative details that make these “classic” neighborhoods so charming can be the source of safety hazards as well. This doesn’t mean your association residents have to give up their dream homes for newer construction – all housing comes with its own set of attributes and problems.

Being aware of common safety risks in older structures that may be association responsibility and taking the steps to correct them is essential in maintaining the real estate assets of your community. While any home purchase is an investment, purchasing an older home in an association is perhaps even more so, considering what the owner and association will put back into it. Maintaining or repairing these five common trouble spots will ensure that your homes retain or even increase in value.

**Lead paint** – By far, the biggest source of concern in an older home is lead paint. Lead was used in residential paints as late as the 1970’s, and according to HUD, about 38 million homes in the U.S. still have some lead paint. Lead paint that’s intact does not pose a great health risk, so it’s crucial to proceed carefully if you suspect your association buildings have this. Do not ever attempt to scrape or sand away paint unless you’ve been assured by a professional that it’s safe to do so. Improper removal of lead paint can cause dangerous levels of lead to be leached into the air, and while children are more susceptible to lead poisoning, airborne lead is unsafe for anyone.

**Chimney** - Fireplaces are often a home’s biggest selling point, but they are also one of the more dangerous features if not

cared for properly. Chimneys were not always built with the proper lining – getting it lined is an easy and inexpensive safety precaution to take. Older fireplaces, flues, and chimneys also need to be cleaned more often than newer models.

**Building Codes** – In recent years, construction codes have become stricter, especially in the area of foundation materials and sealants. A cracked foundation is a recipe for disaster – water intrusion and structural threats are only two of the serious problems that can occur.

---

The decorative details that make “classic” homes so charming can also be the source of safety hazards.

---

A Professional Engineer is required to identify and draw up a design solution to resolve structural issues such as a cracked foundation, so an appointment with one is the only course of action. In

the meantime, make sure all downspouts are draining water away from the foundation.

**Electrical wiring and outlets** – Some older homes contain antiquated wiring that is not grounded. Any homeowner can easily spot the visual clue: their outlets will have two prongs instead of three. GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) outlets are now required in bathrooms, kitchens, and garages, as they will automatically shut off power if a piece of equipment comes into contact with water. If rewiring is needed to install grounded wiring, it can get quite expensive for both residents and the association, but done on a house-by-house basis, the cost is minimal when compared to the safety benefits and regulatory compliance.

**Smoke and CO detectors** – While some older buildings will have smoke detectors, many need to be refitted with both smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Combination detectors are easy to install, making this the simplest safety measure you can take.

---

**Criterion Engineers** is an international engineering firm located in 38 states and 1 Canadian province. Our over 70 office locations are all owned and operated by licensed Professional Engineers who are dedicated to their community association market. We combine the resources of international engineering leaders with the services and knowledge of a local firm.

For more information about our services, please call for a free brochure!

**1-866-966-1969**

Genevieve Burnell, Editor  
gburnell@criterion-engineers.com

[ Visit us on the Web!  
[www.criterioncas.com](http://www.criterioncas.com) ]

**CRITERIUM**<sup>®</sup>  
**ENGINEERS**

