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Passing the Sniff Test in Selling the Home

In addition to depersonalizing and decluttering, experts say home sellers need to be concerned about odors.

Sales associates polled informally by REALTOR® Magazine Online a few years ago said the lingering presence of pets, tobacco, mildew, and decay in the air are major deal-breakers.

Given that not everyone smells the same odors and that people can become accustomed to a particular smell over time, it is important for property sellers to have their sales associates or another objective party inform them about unpleasant scents in their homes.

According to Joan Cromwell, a Chevy Chase, Md.-based Long & Foster practitioner, if buyers "can't imagine clearing the smell, they can't imagine occupying that space."

In particular, the smell of cat urine is especially difficult to remove. Chris Coffin of the Alexandria, Va.-based branch of the cleaning company ServiceMaster estimates that spot-cleaning carpets and replacing the carpet pad would cost home buyers upwards of \$400; removing and replacing saturated floors would cost much more.

Coffin says that it often takes three cleanings to remove nicotine odors from walls, and some cases involve the replacement of insulation.

Experts urge home buyers to be wary of air fresheners, candles, and other scents when touring homes, as they could be used to conceal offensive odors. A better solution for sellers, they say, is to clean drapes, sheets, and pet bedding as well as to air out the house.

Source: *Washington Post*, Dina ElBoghdady (06/23/07)

