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**Inspector Advisor: Digital Cameras**By Jerry Peck, InspectorAdvisor.com

Every home inspector today should carry a good, reliable digital camera for taking photos of what they are inspecting. Here’s why.  
  
Today’s digital cameras have a much higher resolution and larger storage capacity than those dinosaur digital cameras had when they were first introduced. Today’s cameras have so much storage capacity for photos that there is no reason not to take a photo of… everything and anything. Taking photos of everything allows you to document everything, which allows you to go back and remember what you inspected more accurately. You then get to decide which photos to include in the report and which to not include. It’s a good idea to retain all of the photos in case you ever need documentation.  
  
**DOs**  
Do take wide, overall-view photos showing the area around what you want to show as the main focus. A wide angle photo shows context and may save your butt someday when you are questioned whether the photo is in fact from that inspection of that particular home. The surrounding items and area will show “where” the photo was taken (i.e., in the house in question in the basement) as well as “what” the subject of the photo is (i.e., the water heater, for example). A wide angle photo is more conclusive about the setting.  
  
Do take close-up photos of things such as nameplates and other information: multiple taps, input ratings, manufacturer names, model and serial numbers etc.  
  
Do start with a wide photo of the area where the item is (water heater), then a closer photo of the entire water heater, followed by a photo of the nameplate and its information, with additional photos of related items (T&P relief valve and discharge line, pan and drain, electrical/gas connection, etc.).  
  
Do get into the habit of taking photos of everything. You will use the photos to help remember what you saw and also to show what was there, and what wasn’t, should you be questioned later about something on the inspection. For example, a seller may change out an appliance after the inspection with an older and/or cheaper appliance… sellers do this more often than you might think and, without a photo, you have no proof of what was there at the time of your inspection.  
  
**DON'Ts**  
Don't take photos of personal items – no one wants a photo of their bed, clothes, jewelry, safe, etc, in your photos. If such an item is in a photo which shows something else you would like to use in the report, use a graphics program to pixelate the personal item or distort/cover it in some way so it is not viewable in the photo.  
  
Don't include addresses or names on your photos. It is not professional and it is not necessary. The photos are in the report, anyone who is reading the report already knows the names and address. Anyone who sees the photos outside of the report (photos can be extracted from reports) has no business knowing the address or names. It is not good practice as it can increase your liability. Unintended persons may see the address and names and then if something happens, you are the party responsible for providing that information to them.  
  
Don't upload photos with names or addresses to the Internet. The best way to avoid doing that is to avoid putting names and/ or addresses on the photos in the first place. If you do use a name or address in the file name (which I highly discourage), it is best practice to and you MUST ensure that file names are changed before posting to the Internet.  
  
Don't insert a photo into a report without looking at it to make sure that it shows what you are referring to in sufficient detail for your client to understand. Use arrows, circles or some other method to show what you are referring to in a photo; just because you know what you are referring to does not mean your client will know, unless you point it out. And most importantly, make sure the photo does not show something you missed writing up in the report. Review the photo first as it is your last chance to add something to the report that you did not see before.  
  
**Best Practices**  
Look over each photo in your report and write a notation below it of what is being shown. If there is something in the photo that wasn’t noticed before, add it to the report right then. Some inspectors include a photo in the report at particular sections; other inspectors include the photos at the end of the report. I included photos at the end of the report – to me, putting all photos at the end makes the report cleaner and easier to read and often one photo leads to the next and so on. I included this statement in the written section: “This report includes both the written section and the photo section. The two sections together make the entire report. DO NOT USE ONLY the ‘written section’ or the ‘photo section’ by itself, as some items may only be shown in the written section or photo section and some items may not be shown in both sections.” Include the same wording in the photo section. That wording ties the two sections together as being “the report.”  
  
Remember, there is no such thing as “taking too many photos.” While many believe that “too many photos” in a report is distracting, “too few photos” in the report can expose you to calls, complaints, and lawsuits. Those calls and complaints could have been avoided had the photo showing that item been included in the report, and receiving calls and complaints is not good for business. It is far better to “show and tell” in the report than to have to “explain why you did not” to a judge. Remember the old adage – “a photo is worth a thousand words”; use photos to write those words for you.  
  
The photos you include in your report illustrate what you are pointing out to your client. Save all of the photos you took in a computer file; you never know if or when you may want or need to refer to a photo from a previous inspection. It probably doesn’t need to be said but it’s helpful to create a file folder for each inspection and within that folder create a “Photos” subfolder to put all the photo files in. That makes it easy to reference the photos for that inspection.  
  
We’ve touched on why it is not wise to include identifying information in the names of the photos you include in the report or post to the Internet. I used a macro to insert the photos into a table at the end of the report. I used a file renaming program to rename the files ‘image0001.jpg’ with each successive image being named ‘0002.jpg,’ ‘0003.jpg’ etc. After renaming the files, I clicked the macro and it sequentially inserted each photo into its proper place in the table. The macro saved me from having to insert the photos one by one.

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**About the Author**Jerry Peck has been in construction since 1972, first as a contractor then as an inspector; he has been inspecting since 1991. He is the owner of Construction Litigation Consultants, LLC and does construction consulting, construction defect litigation consulting, and personal injury litigation consulting relating to construction of new and existing buildings. He has consulted with clients across the state of Florida and throughout the Southeast, as well as having had cases from Arizona, Kentucky, Oregon, Montana, New Jersey, and more. Jerry is a licensed General Contractor, Plans Examiner, and Code Inspector in Florida. He also does code consulting related to the Florida Building Codes and the International Building Codes, along with various state codes based on the International Building Codes. Peck answers your questions at [InspectorAdvisor.com](file:///\\SERVER\workingre-new\wreonline%20newsletters\hi%20newsletters\InspectorAdvisor.com).

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