

DISCLOSURE vs. DISCLAIMER

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The Maryland REALTORS® Association provides two standard forms, to be used in tandem, by its members to fulfill a very important step in the process of purchasing resale (as opposed to new construction) residential properties.

The first of these two forms is only two pages but it has a very long title:
NOTICE TO BUYER AND SELLER OF BUYER'S RIGHTS AND SELLER'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER MARYLAND'S SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY CONDITION DISCLOSURE LAW

It serves to introduce the disclosure / disclaimer issue, legal requirements, and the actions required and actions to be considered. This form deserves to be read very carefully and fully understood. Reading it a second and third time would not be a bad idea. Not getting this step right could have far reaching and very expensive consequences well past the transfer of ownership. Ask your REALTOR® and/or attorney for help in understanding what needs to be done, if you don't fully understand the contents.

The second of these two forms provides the seller(s) with the opportunity to either disclose, or disclaim any knowledge of, any and all known defects, and any material facts, that could possibly affect a decision by a buyer to purchase, and at what price.

Note that, in either case, whether the seller(s) opt to complete the disclosure portion of the form (first three pages), or just sign the disclaimer portion (fourth page), they still must disclose any "latent defects"

"Latent defects" under Section 10-702 means material defects in real property or an improvement to real property that:

- (i) A buyer would not reasonably be expected to ascertain or observe by a careful visual inspection, and
- (ii) Would pose a threat to the health or safety of the buyer or an occupant of the property, including a tenant or invitee of the buyer;

Examples of potential latent defects:

- notice has been received from a local government or authority that something about the property must be fixed,
- appropriate or proper building or other permits where not obtained for the property,
- the basement of the house was “finished” by the seller and in the process covered a large crack in the basement wall or floor that affects the structure,
- a seller knows that whenever it rains, water enters the house,
- the home was a former drug manufacturing or processing facility and residual toxins may remain,
- foundation instabilities or cracks,
- leaks in the ceiling or roof,
- plumbing issues (i.e. water leakage in basement),
- toxic conditions, such as the presence of lead, mold, radon or asbestos, and
- faulty electrical wiring.

NOTICE TO BUYER AND SELLER OF BUYER'S RIGHTS AND SELLER'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER MARYLAND'S SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY CONDITION DISCLOSURE LAW

ADDENDUM dated _____ to the Contract of Sale
between Buyer _____
and Seller _____
for Property known as _____.

NOTE: This notice does not apply to: (1) the initial sale of single family residential property which has never been occupied, or for which a certificate of occupancy has been issued within one year prior to the date of the Contract; (2) a transfer that is exempt from the transfer tax under Subsection 13-207 of the Tax-Property Article, except land installments contracts of sale under Subsection 13-207(a)(11) of the Tax-Property Article and options to purchase real property under Subsection 13-207(a)(12) of the Tax-Property Article; (3) a sale by a lender or an affiliate or subsidiary of a lender that acquired the real property by foreclosure or deed in lieu of foreclosure; (4) a sheriff's sale, tax sale, or sale by foreclosure, partition or by court appointed trustee; (5) a transfer by a fiduciary in the course of the administration of a decedent's estate, guardianship, conservatorship, or trust; (6) a transfer of single family residential real property to be converted by the buyer into a use other than residential use or to be demolished; or (7) a sale of unimproved real property.

Section 10-702 of the Real Property Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland ("Section 10-702") requires that a seller of a single family residential property ("the property") deliver to each buyer, on or before entering into a contract of sale, on a form published and prepared by the Maryland Real Estate Commission, **EITHER**:

- (A) A written property condition disclosure statement listing all defects including latent defects, or information of which the seller has actual knowledge in relation to the following:
- (i) Water and sewer systems, including the source of household water, water treatment systems, and sprinkler systems;
 - (ii) Insulation;
 - (iii) Structural systems, including the roof, walls, floors, foundation and any basement;
 - (iv) Plumbing, electrical, heating, and air conditioning systems;
 - (v) Infestation of wood-destroying insects;
 - (vi) Land use matters;
 - (vii) Hazardous or regulated materials, including asbestos, lead-based paint, radon, underground storage tanks, and licensed landfills;
 - (viii) Any other material defects, including latent defects, of which the seller has actual knowledge;
 - (ix) Whether the required permits were obtained for any improvements made to the property;
 - (x) Whether the smoke alarms:
 - 1. will provide an alarm in the event of a power outage;
 - 2. are over 10 years old; and
 - 3. if battery operated, are sealed, tamper resistant units incorporating a silence/hush button and use long-life batteries as required in all Maryland homes by 2018; and
 - (xi) If the property relies on the combustion of a fossil fuel for heat, ventilation, hot water, or clothes dryer operation, whether a carbon monoxide alarm is installed on the property.

"Latent defects" under Section 10-702 means material defects in real property or an improvement to real property that:

- (i) A buyer would not reasonably be expected to ascertain or observe by a careful visual inspection, and
- (ii) Would pose a threat to the health or safety of the buyer or an occupant of the property, including a tenant or invitee of the buyer;

OR

- (B) A written disclaimer statement providing that:
- (i) Except for latent defects of which the seller has actual knowledge, the seller makes no representations or warranties as to the condition of the real property or any improvements on the real property; and



Buyer _____ / _____

Seller _____ / _____



Note that the above form advises twice that you should consider hiring a professional home inspector – regardless of whether a disclosure or a disclaimer is made and regardless of what information may be revealed in either document. The only exception might be if a disclaimer is made with no latent defects identified and the property is being purchased “as is” and will be torn down – such that it doesn’t matter if there are defects.

OK, so that’s the informational “notice” about this issue and head’s up that there is another form that should be provided with it or forthcoming very shortly. It is entitled: **MARYLAND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLOSURE AND DISCLAIMER STATEMENT** and it is supposed to appear at some point prior to an offer being made on the property or at the time of offer acceptance or ratification of the contract – or soon thereafter.

Promptly take the time to carefully review the content of the form and the seller provided answers, information and explanations. Make a note of anything that raises any question or concern and ask follow-up questions of the seller(s) through your agents. Also, bring these items to the attention of your inspectors and ask them to pay special attention to those areas. A copy of the completed document should also be given to the inspectors so that they are aware of any flags raised.

The answers and information provided on this form should be a very important part of the decision to move forward with this purchase. Does further investigation reveal something that can be lived with, or something that needs to be made part of the request to the sellers for mitigation, repair, replacement or perhaps a credit at settlement where permissible. Or, worst case, something that you decide you cannot live with.

MARYLAND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLOSURE AND DISCLAIMER STATEMENT

Property Address: _____

Legal Description: _____

NOTICE TO SELLER AND PURCHASER

Section 10-702 of the Real Property Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, requires the owner of certain residential real property to furnish to the purchaser either (a) a RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLAIMER STATEMENT stating that the owner is selling the property "as is" and makes no representations or warranties as to the condition of the property or any improvements on the real property, except as otherwise provided in the contract of sale, or in a listing of latent defects; or (b) a RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT disclosing defects or other information about the condition of the real property actually known by the owner. Certain transfers of residential property are excluded from this requirement (see the exemptions listed below).

10-702. EXEMPTIONS. The following are specifically excluded from the provisions of §10-702:

- 1. The initial sale of single family residential real property:
A. that has never been occupied; or
B. for which a certificate of occupancy has been issued within 1 year before the seller and buyer enter into a contract of sale;
2. A transfer that is exempt from the transfer tax under §13-207 of the Tax-Property Article, except land installment contracts of sales under §13-207(a) (11) of the Tax-Property Article and options to purchase real property under §13-207(a)(12) of the Tax-Property Article;
3. A sale by a lender or an affiliate or subsidiary of a lender that acquired the real property by foreclosure or deed in lieu of foreclosure;
4. A sheriff's sale, tax sale, or sale by foreclosure, partition, or by court appointed trustee;
5. A transfer by a fiduciary in the course of the administration of a decedent's estate, guardianship, conservatorship, or trust;
6. A transfer of single family residential real property to be converted by the buyer into use other than residential use or to be demolished; or
7. A sale of unimproved real property.

Section 10-702 also requires the owner to disclose information about latent defects in the property that the owner has actual knowledge of. The owner must provide this information even if selling the property "as is." "Latent defects" are defined as: Material defects in real property or an improvement to real property that:

- (1) A purchaser would not reasonably be expected to ascertain or observe by a careful visual inspection of the real property; and
(2) Would pose a direct threat to the health or safety of:
(i) the purchaser; or
(ii) an occupant of the real property, including a tenant or invitee of the purchaser.

MARYLAND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

NOTICE TO OWNERS: Complete and sign this statement only if you elect to disclose defects, including latent defects, or other information about the condition of the property actually known by you; otherwise, sign the Residential Property Disclaimer Statement. You may wish to obtain professional advice or inspections of the property; however, you are not required to undertake or provide any independent investigation or inspection of the property in order to make the disclosure set forth below. The disclosure is based on your personal knowledge of the condition of the property at the time of the signing of this statement.

NOTICE TO PURCHASERS: The information provided is the representation of the Owners and is based upon the actual knowledge of Owners as of the date noted. Disclosure by the Owners is not a substitute for an inspection by an independent home inspection company, and you may wish to obtain such an inspection. The information contained in this statement is not a warranty by the Owners as to the condition of the property of which the Owners have no knowledge or other conditions of which the Owners have no actual knowledge.

How long have you owned the property? _____

Property System: Water, Sewage, Heating & Air Conditioning (Answer all that apply)

- Water Supply o Public o Well o Other _____
Sewage Disposal o Public o Septic System approved for _____(# bedrooms) Other Type _____
Garbage Disposal o Yes o No
Dishwasher o Yes oNo
Heating o Oil o Natural Gas o Electric o Heat Pump Age ____ o Other _____
Air Conditioning o Oil o Natural Gas oElectric o Heat Pump Age ____ o Other _____
Hot Water o Oil o Natural Gas oElectric Capacity _____ Age_____ o Other _____

Please indicate your actual knowledge with respect to the following:

1. Foundation: Any settlement or other problems? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

2. Basement: Any leaks or evidence of moisture? Yes No Unknown Does Not Apply

Comments: _____

3. Roof: Any leaks or evidence of moisture? Yes No Unknown

Type of Roof: _____ Age _____

Comments: _____

Is there any existing fire retardant treated plywood? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

4. Other Structural Systems, including exterior walls and floors:

Comments: _____

Any defects (structural or otherwise)? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

5. Plumbing system: Is the system in operating condition? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

6. Heating Systems: Is heat supplied to all finished rooms? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

Is the system in operating condition? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

7. Air Conditioning System: Is cooling supplied to all finished rooms? Yes No Unknown Does Not Apply

Comments: _____

Is the system in operating condition? Yes No Unknown Does Not Apply

Comments: _____

8. Electric Systems: Are there any problems with electrical fuses, circuit breakers, outlets or wiring?

Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

8A. Will the smoke alarms provide an alarm in the event of a power outage? Yes No

Are the smoke alarms over 10 years old? Yes No

If the smoke alarms are battery operated, are they sealed, tamper resistant units incorporating a silence/hush button, which use long-life batteries as required in all Maryland Homes by 2018? Yes No

Comments: _____

9. Septic Systems: Is the septic system functioning properly? Yes No Unknown Does Not Apply

When was the system last pumped? Date _____ Unknown

Comments: _____

10. Water Supply: Any problem with water supply? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

Home water treatment system: Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

Fire sprinkler system: Yes No Unknown Does Not Apply

Comments: _____

Are the systems in operating condition? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

11. Insulation:

In exterior walls? Yes No Unknown

In ceiling/attic? Yes No Unknown

In any other areas? Yes No Where? _____

Comments: _____

12. Exterior Drainage: Does water stand on the property for more than 24 hours after a heavy rain?

Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

Are gutters and downspouts in good repair? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

13. Wood-destroying insects: Any infestation and/or prior damage? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

Any treatments or repairs? Yes No Unknown

Any warranties? Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

14. Are there any hazardous or regulated materials (including, but not limited to, licensed landfills, asbestos, radon gas, lead-based paint, underground storage tanks, or other contamination) on the property?

Yes No Unknown

If yes, specify below

Comments: _____

15. If the property relies on the combustion of a fossil fuel for heat, ventilation, hot water, or clothes dryer operation, is a carbon monoxide alarm installed in the property?

Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

16. Are there any zoning violations, nonconforming uses, violation of building restrictions or setback requirements or any recorded or unrecorded easement, except for utilities, on or affecting the property?

Yes No Unknown

If yes, specify below

Comments: _____

16A. If you or a contractor have made improvements to the property, were the required permits pulled from the county or local permitting office? Yes No Does Not Apply Unknown

Comments: _____

17. Is the property located in a flood zone, conservation area, wetland area, Chesapeake Bay critical area or Designated Historic District?

Yes No Unknown If yes, specify below

Comments: _____

18. Is the property subject to any restriction imposed by a Home Owners Association or any other type of community association?

Yes No Unknown If yes, specify below

Comments: _____

19. Are there any other material defects, including latent defects, affecting the physical condition of the property?

Yes No Unknown

Comments: _____

NOTE: Owner(s) may wish to disclose the condition of other buildings on the property on a separate RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT.

The owner(s) acknowledge having carefully examined this statement, including any comments, and verify that it is complete and accurate as of the date signed. The owner(s) further acknowledge that they have been informed of their rights and obligations under §10-702 of the Maryland Real Property Article.

Owner _____ Date _____

Owner _____ Date _____

The purchaser(s) acknowledge receipt of a copy of this disclosure statement and further acknowledge that they have been informed of their rights and obligations under §10-702 of the Maryland Real Property Article.

Purchaser _____ Date _____

Purchaser _____ Date _____

MARYLAND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLAIMER STATEMENT

NOTICE TO OWNER(S): Sign this statement only if you elect to sell the property without representations and warranties as to its condition, except as otherwise provided in the contract of sale and in the listing of latent defects set forth below; otherwise, complete and sign the RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT.

Except for the latent defects listed below, the undersigned owner(s) of the real property make no representations or warranties as to the condition of the real property or any improvements thereon, and the purchaser will be receiving the real property "as is" with all defects, including latent defects, which may exist, except as otherwise provided in the real estate contract of sale. The owner(s) acknowledge having carefully examined this statement and further acknowledge that they have been informed of their rights and obligations under §10-702 of the Maryland Real Property Article.

The owner(s) has actual knowledge of the following latent defects: _____

Owner _____ Date _____

Owner _____ Date _____

The purchaser(s) acknowledge receipt of a copy of this disclaimer statement and further acknowledge that they have been informed of their rights and obligations under §10-702 of the Maryland Real Property Article.

Purchaser _____ Date _____

Purchaser _____ Date _____

DISCLAIMER

John P. Hale is a licensed real estate agent in Maryland and Pennsylvania. He is affiliated with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Westminster, Maryland. John has been licensed since 2000 and also practiced in Tucson, Arizona for many years. Mr. Hale holds the following designations and certifications awarded by the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) and other authorized institutions: ABR-Accredited Buyers Representative, AHWD-At Home With Diversity, CNE-Certified Negotiation Expert, CRMS-Certified Risk Management Specialist, CRS-Certified Residential Specialist, CTA-Certified Tourism Ambassador, e-PRO-Online Real Estate Practice, GRI-Graduate of Realtor Institute, MRE-Master of Real Estate, MREP-Mortgage Real Estate Professional, and MRP-Military Relocation Professional.

Please note that this article was written by John to provide objective information and to also reflect his opinion of good practice at the time of its' writing for the general benefit of those considering sale or purchase of real estate. It is not intended as definitive legal advice and you should not act upon it as such without seeking independent legal and financial counsel. Frequent changes in the law and standards of practice may cause this information to become outdated and no longer applicable or incorrect.