Whenever the rain falls on Mari-bel Hefeli’s two-story house in southeast Orange County, she can see right through the stucco and trace the outline of every concrete block in the walls.

Once inside her $175,000 home, she can’t use the handrail up the stairs because it is so loose it might pull out of the wall. Some of the baseboards are peeling away. In the kitchen, there’s a growing gap between the counter and the wall. And the smoke detectors tend to fall from their mounts on the ceiling.

“How can something like this pass?” asked Hefeli, who moved into her home just before Christmas 2001.

Actually, none of the problems in Hefeli’s Centex-built home violates any part of the Florida building code, which sets minimum standards for the structural systems and materials that go into a house. Hefeli’s issues fall into the categories of craftsmanship and aesthetics, neither of which is covered by the code.

“How are the type of things we look at,” acknowledged Bob Olin, Orange County’s acting chief building official.

In fact, a yearlong investigation of new-home construction in Central Florida by the Orlando Sentinel and WESH-NewsChannel 2 found that the state building code — and the often-overworked, sometimes-careless local inspectors who enforce it — offers little or no assurance that a buyer will move into a well-built, fault-free home.

The bottom line: Building inspectors look out for the structural integrity of a house — but no one really is checking the quality of the construction.

“Caveat emptor [buyer beware] is the rule,” said Paul Waan, an Orlando attorney specializing in real estate.

CONTINUED ON A30
Inspectors check as many as 40 homes a day

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A day in the life of a residential building inspector

Inspectors check as many as 40 homes a day
Builders want code kept as it is

Sometimes I think we are./* Sentinel and WESH, Lake's Scheitler said, "That sounds like an inspection."

The reality of the work is there are days lots of inspections are called in," Rhodes responded. "Clearly, we would prefer not to do that many inspections."

Rhodes also ordered the city to resume collecting the $50 inspection fee, which is supposed to be charged when an inspector finds a problem that may need to be fixed later. "You just can't do it a right way," he said.

"The quality suffers"

In the past year, there have been code changes to deal with problems related to the way Orlando inspectors look over each home. Area agencies typically promise next-day service on an inspection request and penalties for homes that are not inspected within 72 hours. That hasn't been a major problem in Orlando, however, because the city is laying down the law.

"The inspectors are too fast," Rhodes said. "They're knowledgeable, and they're great," said Alex Hannigan, a six-year veteran who makes $42,000 a year as a building inspector for Orlando. "They're doing the best they can under the circumstances, but the quality suffers."

"You can't say they aren't doing a thorough inspection," said Steve Hefeli, a former contractor who moved from Chicago with her family to the Waterford Lakes development in Orlando. "But they aren't thorough enough."

"They're not bothering to dig up the pipes or check on too many homes," Hefeli said.

"They're optimistic that they can't redo the footers," Rhodes said.

Hefeli said she began to suspect her house wasn't as nice as she thought when the smoke detectors began falling the day they were installed. Instead of going over it with a critical eye, she said, "It looked more like a group went in with a critical eye," she said. "It was terrible." Hefeli said inspectors who inspect houses won't be as thorough when they have to do their inspections at a faster pace. "If you think they're not looking at the quality, then you think they're not doing the inspections," she said. "If you think they're not doing the inspections, then they don't stay in business."
2 inspectors look at job differently

1 often fails work he sees; 1 rarely does

By DAN TRACY

Formerly, Lake County building inspector at work in Clermont, Romboli was known as a frequent re-inspector. Though he is certified to inspect homes of any size, most are relatively simple, single-family homes, his approach, even if they have to pay the $25 re-inspection fee and do a job a second time. But Romboli is also certified to inspect those of Altamonte Springs whose masonry manager for Brentwood Custom Homes, who makes $42,000 a year.

They are basics that Lakeside Inspections — the most of any Central Florida counties, plus the city of Orlando — makes. But it doesn't speak to the fit-and-finish, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe, the stove is attached to the wall, the washer and dryer against high winds, the wiring is safe.
Osceola settles claim but keeps deal quiet

Homeowner wins $5,000 for overlooked flaws

By BOB HREB

section Sport Source

Deyne Matzinger said an $8,000 check from the county covered a $5,000 lawsuit she filed after inspectors missed mistakes in her home. Her lawyer engineered a settlement — in Osceola or elsewhere — in which other homeowners unhappy with county building inspectors are not interested in such problems.

"I was cheap to settle than fight," the 40-year-old homemaker, and her husband, William, in late July. One key to the deal was keeping it quiet, according to a transcript of the Osceola County commissioners and administrators.

"I won't let our story be heard of how the inspections are and what's wrong," said Matzinger, in the July 28 meeting obtained through a public records request by the Orlando Sentinel. "We had an uncommon victory for an uncommon case — a nuisance that can't be advertised what the settlement was and why, " said County Attorney John DeBoer, who described the negotiations as "incredibly litigious" and "contentious." "To say we had a good outcome is an understatement," he added. It was an uncommon victory for an uncommon case — a nuisance that can't be advertised what the settlement was and why.

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