

National Home Inspector Certification Council

Confusion over Designations

Currently there are well known two home inspection associations that claim ownership of the designation “RHI”. CAHPI (Canadian Association of Home Inspectors) and OAHI (Ontario Association of Home Inspectors) both provide home inspector certification for inspectors that meet their specific certification requirements to advertise their membership as an RHI.

So, where and how did this confusion start? Furthermore, can consumers be possibly misled by an inspector claiming this certification status?

A little history: The titles “RHI and Registered Home Inspector” is currently governed by OAHI by the Ontario Home Inspectors Act, 1994. It provided OAHI exclusive right to the use of the designations. The Home Inspection Act, 2017, repeals the OAHI Act. However, since the 2017 Act is not officially endorsed, it does not surrender the continued use designation RHI and Registered Home Inspector by OAHI’s certified members in Ontario. From the CAHPI perspective the Government of Canada Canadian Trademarks Database indicates “Registered Home Inspectors (RHI)” being registered on February 19th of 1998, and claimed use in Canada since September 13th, 1996. The registrant listed in the database is CAHPI.

To complicate the issue of the RHI designation even more, the title “RHI” was awarded in most every province in Canada by what was then deemed CAHPI National by one of their affiliated home inspection associations, such as OAHI. The fact is the RHI title did not provide a consistent or even a unified level of certification. Thus, certification requirements for RHI varied significantly across the country.

Today CAHPI represents a national home inspection association with “home inspector members”, rather than representation by provincial association. It claims the use and ownership of the designation RHI. According to CAHPI’s website *“Affiliation with CAHPI and receiving their designations National Certificate Holder® and Registered Home Inspectors (RHI)® from a professional organization is the best evidence of an inspector’s competence and professionalism”*. Maybe it’s just me, but the only significant difference between the two that I see is the “s” on the word “Inspectors”.

Another POV: The Registrar of Trademarks and Federal Court in Canada indicate “a trademark is unregistrable if it is clearly descriptive or deceptively misdescriptive”. So, where does that leave unknowing consumers? Given the similarities in the nature of the goods and the nature of the trade this predicament also adds to ambiguity and creates divisiveness within the associations.

More to the point about consumer protection - proceed with caution. Caution is necessary embracing residential home inspections as an acceptable means of protecting consumers. As stated above there are fundamental gaps in the certification process and requirements. Although a home inspection generally provides some form of protection it begs the question of independence about who certifies and inspects inspectors. Therefore with no independent 3rd party review and questionable certification requirements regarding many designations, home inspection associations simply appear to have “dumbed down” certification, thus posing a risk in a largely unregulated market.

Since the beginning of the year 2000 almost 2 million dollars was invested by CMHC and HRSDC along with countless hours of in-kind contributions with home inspector sector-based representatives. Through several phases of development an “occupational standard” was created along with an “occupational analysis” that brought forward a “national” certification standard and comprehensive

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assessment system. This formed the benchmark for a reasonably acceptable certification known as the “NCH – National Certificate Holder” and National Certification Program. The NCH designation met with opposition since it was deemed as competing with the “RHI”. In mid-2010, CAHPI abandoned the NCH national certification program to appease its provincial affiliates.

A review of current NCH certification requirements clearly indicates the benchmark is lower than the original baseline requirements mandated in 2010. So even today, the NCH designation is open to questioning an inspector’s competency.

Many associations added “mentoring” into their certification requirements. Mentoring can be a beneficial and purposeful process; but feedback indicates the quality provided can vary greatly. But more to the point - who can mentor, and what are the difficulties of the mentoring process? Mentoring can be very subjective, based on the mentors knowledge, experience, quality and impartiality. There must be firewalls in place to ensure autonomy and impartiality. Without taking the time to develop good mentors, there are challenges facing mentoring. Thus the scope tends to be very limited.

In 2010, the National Certification Program was reborn under the NHICC (National Home Inspector Certification Council), a truly independent “certification authority” comprised of the elected administrators let go by CAHPI. As an independent certification authority it maintains membership in the Institute of Credentialing Excellence (ICE), and follows its rigorous certification standards.

Since the NHICC board members were very familiar with the inadequacies of “associations”, independent certification became its primary mandate. The new program provides the NHI title (National Home Inspector) and maintains the program certification structure that exceeds both of the claimed designations of OAH and CAHPI. Accordingly, upholding the original intent of raising and unifying the certification level required to practice home inspection. Currently the NHICC – NHI certification process is recognized in BC and Alberta where licensing of home inspection is mandated.

As true inspection professionals the goal should be set to maintaining a reasonable but standardized performance-based assessment that provides real benchmarks of an inspector’s skills and ability. Certification must include accredited education and “field testing”, and an objective “Canadian based exam” to assess knowledge from a sound job-task analysis, as well as peer-reviews by appropriately trained examiners. Otherwise who can really protect consumers?

As noted earlier, CMHC & HRSDC launched the “national initiative” to enhance the credibility and status of the inspection sector to help harmonize licensing, performance standards and the certification of home inspectors. Unfortunately today we seem no further ahead, since the push by associations seems to be about bigger or better than, numbers rather than quality. So consumers need to be cautious!

Ultimately this indicates the need for a reliable higher credible certification benchmark. Regardless of the designation, the designation really means little “IF” certification standards are being diluted.

NOTE: *This article does not suggest that home inspectors are not competent or have malicious intentions. The main purpose presented here is that consumers need to further question the level of expertise being hired and whether it is sufficient to really protect consumers using home inspection services based on such variances that currently exist in the certification system.*