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New rule from Citizens may be taxing

Agents: Inspections of older homes could hurt market

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As the **housing market** recovers from the six-year bust, a new rule from the state-run insurer of last resort could make it more difficult to get insurance for and sell older homes, industry observers say.

Starting Sept. 1, Citizens Property Insurance Corp. began requiring that new customers obtain four-point inspections for single-family homes older than 30 years to ensure that the electrical, heating, plumbing and roofing are in acceptable condition. Previously, Citizens required the inspections on homes older than 50 years.

To be eligible for coverage, the homes must have roofs with at least three years of life left. What's more, homes with polybutylene plumbing and electrical service of fewer than 100 amps no longer qualify for coverage.

"Homes that are more than 30 years old are especially vulnerable to loss if systems and roofing are not kept updated," Citizens said in a statement. "It is the responsibility of every homeowner to properly maintain their property."

Robin Westcott, the state's insurance consumer advocate, understands why Citizens adopted the new policy, but she said it could price too many potential homeowners out of the insurance market.