

Step by Step: A winter home maintenance checklist

By Erin K. Witt

As the weather grows colder, many homeowners are thinking about the stormy winter months ahead. Good planning can help reduce maintenance and utility costs, and protect your family from the cold and hazards of winter weather.

By taking inventory of all your winter home maintenance projects, you can budget and plan for the tasks on your to-do list, and stay warm and safe in your home until spring.

Heating/Insulation/Ventilation

Central heating:

- Make sure all air vents are free of obstructions.**
- Adjust your vents by opening those near the floor and closing those near the ceiling for better air circulation during the winter months.**
- Test your furnace before the weather gets very cold.**
- Consider having your heating system checked by a professional.**
- Have your humidifier cleaned and checked.**
- If your heating system is older than 15 years, consider replacing it with a modern, efficient unit.**
- Replace or clean your furnace air filters.**

Window or through-wall air conditioners:

- Install a winter cover over the unit or remove it for the winter and seal the opening.**

Insulation:

- Make sure attic insulation is at least R30.**
- Make sure crawl space is insulated.**
- Consider insulating your basement walls. Besides saving you heating dollars, it can reduce common moisture problems caused by condensation.**

- ❑ **If at all possible, make sure walls are insulated to R11.**
- ❑ **Insulate any pipes and heating ducts that run through cold unheated crawl spaces or attics.**
- ❑ **If your house was built before 1950, it may be an excellent candidate for cost-saving blown-in wall insulation.**

Attic ventilation:

- ❑ **Make sure attic insulation doesn't cover ventilation vents in the eaves. This helps prevent winter ice dams.**
- ❑ **Make sure ridge vent and vents at eaves are free of plants and debris.**
- ❑ **Make sure bird and rodent screens for attic vents are in good shape.**

Cleaning

- ❑ **Vacuum under and behind freezer and fridge to greatly improve efficiency of the unit.**
- ❑ **Have chimney cleaned and checked by a chimney sweep.**
- ❑ **Have deck power washed and resealed.**

Windows & Doors

- ❑ **If you have the older, removable wooden storm windows, make arrangements to have them re-installed.**
- ❑ **Replace or repair any broken window locks or latches.**
- ❑ **Caulk around frames.**
- ❑ **Check the condition of the putty around the windowpanes. If chunks are falling off, it's time to have fresh putty installed.**
- ❑ **Make sure all windows open and shut properly. This is very important in case of fire.**

Exterior Walls

- ❑ **Check the condition of the mortar joints. Repair cracks and crumbling mortar before more extensive damage occurs.**
- ❑ **Check for rotted wood.**
- ❑ **Check for mud trails, sawdust, and other signs of termite infestation.**
- ❑ **Make sure no firewood piles are leaning up against the side of the house.**

- ❑ **Check for gaps around pipes and wires that go through exterior walls. Caulk so that no air can leak in or out.**
- ❑ **Remove, drain and coil all garden hoses.**
- ❑ **Turn off the interior cut-off valve for each outdoor faucet and then open the outdoor faucet so that no water can freeze in the pipe that connects the two.**

Snow Protection

- ❑ **Make sure the ground around the foundation drops 1/2 inch for every foot as you move away from the foundation. The drop should be greater if water flows are heavy in that area.**
- ❑ **Make sure all concrete patios, walks, and driveways slope away from foundation.**
- ❑ **Keep gutters clean at all times. During the fall it is better to clean them several times rather than waiting until the end of the leaf season.**
- ❑ **Make sure the water is not coming down behind the gutters and that the gutters are properly sloped toward the downspouts. Also check that all support brackets and nails are securely in place. Downspouts should discharge water well away from the foundation.**
- ❑ **If there are any signs of a leak or damaged shingles or flashing, have the roof checked. Generally, if the roof is leaking and is more than 15 years old (with regular shingles), it may be more cost effective to have a new roof put on.**
- ❑ **Make sure all stairwell drains are clear of debris. Consider building a permanent roof over exterior stairwell to prevent debris and rain from getting into the stairwell.**
- ❑ **Test your basement sump pump.**
- ❑ **Make sure all culverts and exterior drains are free of debris.**

Safety

- ❑ **Make sure all smoke detectors are working with fresh batteries.**
- ❑ **Install a carbon monoxide alarm near the furnace and any fireplaces that get used.**
- ❑ **Check all handrails inside and out to make sure they are strong enough to prevent a fall and extend far enough to provide ample support.**

Yard & Garden

- ❑ **Prune shrubs and trees.**
- ❑ **Make arrangements for fall leaf raking.**

- **Make arrangements for winter snow removal.**

Make sure snow and ice removal tools and supplies are on hand.