



## Preventative Fall Maintenance Tips

It's that time of year again. The days are getting shorter and cooler. To ensure that your house remains in prime condition over the winter, a good weekend spent on preventative maintenance is a great investment. By making a thorough inspection of your home inside and out you can detect and repair problems before they become issues. This can save you time and costly headaches down the road. If there are repairs below beyond your comfort zone, hire a licensed Contractor to handle the job.

### **GUTTERS AND DOWNSPOUTS**

Neglected gutters can lead to wood rot problems, pest infestations, wet basements, foundation damage and many other expensive complications.

1. Clean gutters and downspouts frequently throughout fall to prevent build up of leaves and other debris.
2. Be sure water is not coming down behind gutters and that all support brackets are securely in place.
3. If you have trees that overhang or are near your roof, install gutter guards.
4. Check to ensure water drains properly 5'-6' away from the foundation. If it doesn't, settlement of your foundation, water penetration, and damage to your flatwork concrete can result.
5. Seal up any cracks in the driveway, sidewalks, and patio.

### **WOOD OR HARDBOARD SIDING**

1. Seal around all of the penetrations. (ie-A/C refrigerant line, sump pump discharge line, etc.)
2. Check the vertical lap joints or vertical seams and if the existing caulk is cracked open, remove it, and caulk again. (Make sure you're using paintable caulk.)
3. On hardboard panel siding, if the base edge is swelled or slightly rotted, now is a great time to install Cedar trim. Bevel the top edge of the Cedar trim at a 45 degree angle and nail it to the bottom edge of the panel siding making sure the trim hangs down about 1/2". Caulk the top of the board, prime, and paint. This will prevent the siding from drawing any more water from capillary action and rotting.
4. On hardboard panel or lap siding, rotted siding should be replaced.
5. Keep the base edge sealed and painted. On new construction, the base edge of the siding where the lower roof meets the upper wall is almost never painted.
6. Keep the siding painted. Regular exterior paint usually lasts 4-6 years. There is higher grade exterior paint that can last upwards of 20-30 years. It's like painting with thick mud, but lasts great!

### **WINDOWS AND DOORS**

1. Check around the window frames inside and out for potential leaks. Caulk any visible gaps.
2. Inspect and repair any loose or damaged window locks, latches or door frames.
3. Check around all exterior doors for gaps. If it's sunny look for daylight around the door. Install weather stripping to prevent drafts and lower heating bills.
4. If you have older windows check around those for gaps and weather strip as needed.
5. Wood casement windows notoriously are either never stained on the bottom edge of the window or the stain becomes worn off. Once this wood is left exposed, it doesn't take long for it to rot out. Open those windows and stain that exposed wood.

### **HEATING SYSTEMS**

Do you remember the last time your furnace was serviced? Most people don't and neglected furnaces lose efficiency and may have a cracked heat exchanger.

1. Have your heating system cleaned, serviced, and evaluated by a licensed HVAC Company.
2. Replace the filter in your furnace on a regular basis. This is the #1 cause of cracked heat exchangers.
3. Check for leaks around the duct joints. Taking time to seal any gaps with heat tape or duct mastiff can help you lower your utility bills. I've found disconnected ducts that were blowing conditioned air into crawlspaces and attics.

### **PLUMBING**

1. If you have any pipes that run through unconditioned spaces such as crawlspaces or garages, take time to thoroughly insulate them. If your supply pipes have produced icy cold water during the past winters, they may be in danger of freezing. If you have a bathroom that is built over a cantilevered wall or over a deck, house wrap that is sealed properly is critical to prevent air flow while insulation helps keep the conditioned space warm.
2. Disconnect all garden hoses. Even frost-free spigots will freeze if the garden hose holds water in the pipe.

3. Remember to winterize the sprinkler system. If you have a system that drains automatically via gravity, then you need to make sure the valves are turned diagonally and the drain valve has been fully drained. If your system requires the lines to be blown out, get it done before the first freeze. There's nothing worse than turning on a sprinkler system after a hard winter and finding the lines have burst.

### ***CHIMNEY AND FIREPLACE***

Before you fire up your fireplace or stove, have it cleaned and serviced by a Certified Chimney Sweep. Go to the Chimney Sweep Institute of America's website at [www.csia.org](http://www.csia.org) to find a Certified Sweep in your area. In 2009, 21.3% of the chimneys I inspected were breached with either cracked or shifted liners. These conditions pose a threat of carbon monoxide poisoning or catching your home on fire. Numerous ones had heavy creosote buildup, inadequate and/or cracked crowns, missing caps, spalled brick, and deteriorated mortar joints.

### ***SMOKE AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS***

Make sure you have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed on every level of the home. Change the batteries in all the smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and check them frequently. Make sure you install CO detectors with peak level buttons so you can check the highest level since the last time you pushed the button as manufacturers have them calibrated to go off at 50-70 ppm of CO gas when long-term exposure to only 8 ppm can be deadly.

### ***DRYER VENTS***

1. When cleaning the dryer vents, take them apart and clean them out by running water down the vent pipe if possible. You'll be amazed at how much lint is caught in the piping. If the dryer vent is encased in a finished wall or ceiling where removing it isn't possible, hook up a leaf blower and force a high velocity of air through it to blow out the lint.
2. Unplug your dryer, then slide the lint trap out and remove the screws holding the insert that your lint trap slides into. Once this is off, reach your hand into the bottom of the dryer and remove all of the excess lint you can grab. I did this on ours and removed about a basketball sized pile of lint that had been trapped inside the channel of the dryer!
3. Make sure to clean your lint trap off with soapy water. Film can build up on this that blocks airflow making your dryer run much longer to dry your clothes. Don't believe me, run water over your lint trap and see if it holds water like a bowl. Surprise!
4. Make sure the end of the dryer vent doesn't have a mesh on the outside. Lint will clog this up very quickly.

### ***ATTIC VENTILATION***

For proper attic ventilation, the square footage for the intake vents needs to equal the exhaust vents. Rule of thumb is a home should have a soffit vent every 8'. Continuous soffit vents for intake and continuous ridge vents work best. In 2009, 49% of the homes I inspected had inadequate attic ventilation. Poor attic ventilation leads to higher utility bills, moisture building up in the attic space, faster wear-n-tear on your shingles, and it also voids your manufacturer's warranty on those shingles. I've ran across moisture so heavy in attics that the entire bottom side of the roof deck was black with mold.

1. Pop your soffit vents off and hose the Cottonwood or any other debris off them. Most are installed with small screws or nails and can be easily taken off with a screwdriver. If removing them isn't an option, take a leaf blower and blow up into the vent. If you could take them off, before you reinstall them, look up in the opening to make sure the baffles or air channel hasn't been squished. There should be about 1" of space between the roof deck and the insulation here. If the insulation is tight to the roof deck where your soffit vent is located, air is not able to enter the attic rendering that soffit vent useless. Take a broom handle and slide it up along the roof deck and make the 1" air channel again.
2. Explore your attic. If you see mold growth, stains on your rafters, darkened areas on your roof deck, rust on the nails poking through your roof deck, or can smell a musty odor, then you most likely have inadequate attic ventilation. (If you look in the cold of winter and see frost buildup on the nails or roof deck, then you know you have poor attic ventilation also.) If your attic ventilation is inadequate, hire a licensed Roofing Contractor to have it corrected. There are numerous solutions depending on what you already have for attic ventilation and what upgrade would work best for your home.

### ***CRAWLSPACE VENTILATION***

1. At the end of Fall, close up your crawlspace vents. This prevents cold air from entering and freezing your pipes and helps keep the rooms above the crawlspace warmer.
2. Re-open the vents in the Spring. Having them open during the Spring, Summer, & Fall helps reduce moisture buildup if you're in colder climates.

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