



Spring Preventative Maintenance Tips 2010

It's been a brutal winter in the Omaha Metro, but it's coming to an end! With Spring knocking on our doorsteps, it's time for some Spring preventative maintenance. A little maintenance now will save you major repairs down the road.

Water is the #1 cause of damage to the home. Here are some areas to focus:

1. Gutters, downspouts, & extensions
 - a. Make sure they are free of debris, leaves, tennis balls, etc.
 - b. Make sure they slope the right direction & do not have any open seams or holes rusting through
 - c. Check for and replace downspouts that have backed up and split when water froze
 - d. Make sure your extensions extend out at least 5'-6' from the foundation and are securely fastened
 - e. Where the extension drains, make sure the grading keeps the water flowing away from the foundation
 - f. Don't allow the extensions to drain onto your driveway. This can lead to settlement issues with your concrete.
2. Roof Flashing
 - a. Check all of the rooftop penetrations...sewer stacks, B-vent flue stack, around the chimney, etc. Some "repairs" may be sealed with caulk instead of flashed properly. Usually, a cold winter will cause the caulk to crack open and lead to costly roof leaks during the Spring rains.
 - b. Check from inside your attic for signs of roof leaks at these penetration locations
 - c. Check for ice damming. With the heavy snow buildup on the roofs this winter, I'm finding a lot of homes with ice damming. Some common signs are water stains running down your fascia, soffits, and siding visible from the outside. In the attic, the roof deck will be stained or have ice/wet areas towards the eaves or around the valleys depending on where the snow was piled up. This winter I've found ice damming on the south, east, and west sides. The cold temperatures have held the ice & snow in place, but the warm sun was enough to melt some of it and have it back up under the shingles and leak through.
 - d. With the cold weather, attics with inadequate attic ventilation would have had ice/frost frozen to the roof deck and on nails penetrating the roof deck. When the weather warms up, it melts. If it's extensive, you'll see water stains appear on your ceiling. It can ruin your insulation. If you ignore it, mold will flourish and can start deteriorating your roof deck. Before the warm weather hits, pop your head in your attic. If excess moisture is present, your attic needs to be vented and dried out fast before it's too late. Replacing damaged insulation, paying for mold remediation of your attic space, and painting & re-painting your ceilings until the stains disappear will cost you!
 - e. During this Christmas' blizzard, the snow was coming down horizontally. The wind was strong enough to blow heavy amounts of snow into the attics through the turtle vents. I've found ice and snow mounds in the attic 2' high below these vents. If not removed before it melts, you'll have large basket ball size stains or larger in your ceilings.
3. Clean those soffit vents or gable vents
 - a. It's important that air draws properly throughout your entire attic space to prevent heat and moisture from building up
 - b. Most soffit vents can be removed with a screw-driver or ratchet, gable vents usually are secured with a few nails
 - c. Hose them off and re-install them
 - d. When you have the soffit vents off, look up into the attic and make sure there is a baffle installed that easily allows air to flow through it. If insulation is blocking the path or the baffle has been squished, then you need to fix this. You should have about a 1" space between the roof deck and the baffle for proper airflow.
 - e. Rule of thumb for proper attic ventilation is 1 square foot of venting per 150 square feet. That equates to roughly 1 soffit vent every 8' along your eave. If you have a super insulated house, then you can stretch this rule to 1 square foot of venting per 300 square feet of space.
4. Siding, windows, doors, and trim – Keep it sealed!

- a. With wood or hardboard siding, check the bottom edges for missing paint or cracked open paint, check the vertical lap joints for seams that may have opened up, check the bottom edges for swelled/rotted areas
 - b. If the base edge of your hardboard siding is just starting to swell, then it's prime time to take preventative measures and install cedar trim. You must bevel the top edge, let the bottom edge hang down at least ½" over the base edge of the siding, seal it with caulk, prime and paint it. This will extend the life of your hardboard siding for years.
 - c. If your siding is already heavily rotted, then it's too late for preventative maintenance. The rotted areas need to be replaced, not covered over.
 - d. Check the fascia, soffits, window & door trim for peeling paint or cracked open caulk
 - e. Check for rotted wood around the base corners of the windows and doors. It's much easier to replace the tiny rotted areas before they lead to major water damage later.
 - f. For wood casement windows, now is the best time to re-stain the bottom edge of the window frame.
5. Concrete driveways, sidewalks, and patios need to slope away
- a. Patios can settle. If you don't catch this in the Spring and have it mud-jacked back up before the long rains, you'll enjoy water in your basement. Note: mud-jacking can't be done when the ground is frozen.
 - b. Sidewalks can settle also. When this happens, trip hazards arise. Sometimes it's the sidewalk, other times it's the front steps. Mud-jacking here can fix that problem also.
 - c. Driveways that settle and run along the side of your foundation shouldn't be fixed by mud-jacking. Unfortunately, the only proper repair is to replace that section of the driveway. If you can't afford that major expense right away, at least make sure the joint along the foundation wall is sealed with caulk to help prevent water penetration.
 - d. Any cracks that have newly formed, clean them out and seal them back up before next winter
6. Seal those wood decks
- a. If you have melting snow on your deck, pay attention to whether the water is soaking into the wood or beading up on top of it. Chances are it's soaking in. If so, then when the wood dries, it's time to weather seal it
 - b. Don't forget to weather seal the underside as well

Maximize your cooling efficiency

1. Before the cooling season arrives
 - a. Have your A/C or Heat Pump serviced by a licensed HVAC company
 - b. They can clean the fins and make sure your refrigerant level is right which will maximize your efficiency
 - c. Make sure there is no debris or foliage growing tight around your outside units
 - d. Change those furnace filters
 - e. If your A/C unit is not advantageously installed on the north side of your home, then go green by planting some shrubs nearby to shade it. Plant them close enough to shade it, but don't smother it.
 - f. If you have a male dog, then put a fence around the A/C unit or Heat Pump to avoid the costly mistake of having the acidic dog urine eat away the fins and coil
2. Plant some trees in the Spring
 - a. Deciduous trees on the south side of your home will keep your house cooler in the hot summer months, but allow sun to warm your home in the winter months
 - b. Keep the trees away from the foundation – rule of thumb is the canopy of the tree is also the distance the root system will travel
 - c. Don't plant trees near the sewer line – for obvious reasons;-)
 - d. Coniferous trees on the north side and west sides help insulate your home from the harsh winter wind here in Nebraska & Iowa
 - e. Most trees shipped into the mega do-it-yourself stores are grown in sandy soils. Even though they may seem like a great deal, they don't take to our heavy clay soil too well. It's better to plant trees grown locally.

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