

Maintaining proper heat is key in preventing winter home disasters

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM
Special to the Record-Eagle

This year's winter home maintenance and repairs can be summed up in three little words: heat, heat, heat.

Concerned with the ramifications of the heating crunch, cost, efficiency and safety factors, homeowners are looking for help from the pros. Don Montieth, a retired Charlevoix automotive engineer, is an independent contractor for Handyman Connection in Traverse City, and he works with both the precautions and problems cold, snow and water can cause. Montieth finds most problems center around excessive snow, frozen pipes, furnaces, roofs and septic systems. Shoveling or raking snow off roofs, a common sight around town, really isn't necessary, Montieth says, unless the snow is over six inches.

"But that's a maximum," he said, "especially on older homes."

He also cautions people about metal roofs, a growing trend, especially in Canada. The objective is to allow snow to slide off the roof, but Montieth has heard of fatal accidents when the heavy load of wet

snow has slid off onto people. Roof vent pipes should be checked for ice build-up to prevent danger from poisonous gasses.

Since winter is a difficult time for septic tank maintenance, Montieth suggests proactive use of Ridex or a product with similar ingredients. He advises clients to avoid using chlorine as a bleach or general cleaning agent because it kills the bacteria that digest the waste. If a septic tank goes anaerobic due to no bacterial action, bad odors will not be the only problem because in a short time waste solids can enter the tile field, plug it, and back everything up into the home. And replacing a clogged tile field in the dead of winter is an expensive job.

Frozen water pipes can burst and pour thousands of gallons of water into the home while people are out for even a short time during extreme cold. Common sense precautions can avert huge repair bills. If part or all of the home is built over a crawl space, the foundation vents should be closed and sealed during winter. It would pay to check these vent covers after high wind storms since one open vent can cool a crawl space very quickly.

Rooms that are most liable to plumbing freeze-up are those that are more remote like laundry rooms and half baths near attached garages where the water may not be used for days in a row and where heat registers may be closed to save fuel. In extreme cold, it may be a good idea to open the faucets enough to allow a continuous stream of water the size of a soda straw.

Second floor bathrooms supplied by pipes running up an outside wall are especially vulnerable to freezing. People accustomed to "modern" non-freezing hose bibs should check for inside shut-off valves with drain caps if they happen to move into an older home.

Forced air furnace filters should be checked since clogged filters cause heat to build up in the heat exchanges. Baseboard heat mechanisms should be checked for household debris like dog hair, and dust. They can be cleaned with a vacuum or an air compressor.

An organized check of the home's condition and quick action if repair is needed usually prevent the home disasters that, small or large, may ruin the peace of winter.



The heavy snow buildup of this winter has many homeowners shovelling their roofs.

Record-Eagle file photo

One possible answer to the problem of winter roof leaks

By The Associated Press

Question:
My two-story house is 40 feet wide on each side, and has three 12-inch-square vents on the roof's south side. There are four soffit vents on the house's north and south sides. During the winter, frost collects on the attic side of the roof deck and on the rafters. The frost melts and drips on the insulation and seeps through the ceiling. What can I do to reduce the attic moisture in the winter?

Answer:
Your problem is typical of an attic in the northern states that has excessive moisture buildup and inadequate ventilation. The unobstructed attic ventilation should be 1-300th of the attic floor area.

Based on your data, the vent openings are about 20 percent less than the recommended amount. If there are insect screens covering the vent openings, then the percentage is even more. Insect screens reduces the effective opening by about 40 percent.

To increase moisture reduc-

tion, the roof deck between the rafters should be "washed" with cool dry air. This can be achieved with continuous ridge and soffit vents. If these vents cannot be installed, then you must use additional roof and soffit vents. Frost tends to develop on the roof's north slope, there are no vents presently located there, so install vents on the north side.

Also, moisture can migrate into the attic through wall cavities because water can collect in the basement or crawl space after a rain. Keep those areas dry.

What to do when freezing and thawing water causes brick exterior of home to crumble

By The Associated Press

Question:
The exterior brick of our home is porous and is starting to crumble. We had it tuck-pointed and sprayed with a transparent water repellent. This has helped very little. Would painting the bricks with a vinyl or Lucite paint stop the crumbling? Our home is 26 years old and otherwise in very good condition.

Answer:
Unfortunately, the only solution is to replace the deteriorated bricks. Water penetrates through cracks in mortar joints. The water freezes and thaws, causing the bricks to spall.

Once the bricks spall, you cannot reverse the condition. You can only reduce further spalling by sealing cracks or open mortar joints.

Sealing the brick face with a clear, penetrating sealant is not recommended by the Brick

Institute of America. It can cause more harm than good by trapping moisture that was present in the brick. This moisture freezes and causes the bricks to spall.

Painting the bricks is a stop-gap measure. The paint can act as an adhesive, keeping the crumbled pieces together. When the adhesive properties of the paint reach their life cycle, and the paint peels off, the crumbled pieces will peel off with it.



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