

Winter warning: Prepare your home for cold weather

BY JOHN O'CONNELL
Copley News Service

Performing a few maintenance chores can turn a drafty home into a cozy one with the added bonus of saving energy and reducing heating bills.

One of the best ways to have a comfortable home and to control heating costs is to have the furnace checked each year. But this chore should be left to a qualified person. Autumn is an especially busy time for service technician Russ Long with Starnes Mechanical Inc. in Peoria Heights, Ill. Long will do between eight to 10 furnace checks a day during fall. "Problems often arise when the furnace is running continuously in really cold weather," said Long. "You don't want to wait until you have a problem in the middle of the night when temperature is below freezing. Those calls get expensive."

One of the things Long checks for is a crack in the furnace's heat exchanger. This is not only a waste of energy, but is unsafe. Part of his check is to clean and adjust the burner assembly, lubricate the moving parts, check for gas leaks and examine the flue.

To save on natural gas bills, lowering a furnace's thermostat by 2 degrees results in a savings of 3 percent, according to the Central Illinois Light Co.

Ellen Burton is extension educator with the University and she recommended installing a programmable setback thermostat. This can automatically lower the furnace thermostat when people aren't home or asleep and raise it at times when they are in the home and awake. She also recommends changing regular furnace filters once a month and high-efficiency filters every three months. Here are some other win-

terizing tips from Burton:

■ **Roof and gutters:** Check roof for loose shingles and valleys and cracks in and around the chimney.

"Not everyone should be climbing on a roof," said Burton. "But it's something that should be done. Rainwater can get into the house through loose shingles and flashing and cause quite a bit of damage. When my husband was doing our roof check, he installed a screen at the top of the chimney to prevent leaves and small animals from getting in it."

While you're on the roof, take time to clean out your gutters. Rain gutters and downspouts get clogged by falling leaves, causing gutters to overflow, which leads to wet basements or ice dams that cause leaky roofs. This chore may have to be repeated several times during the fall.

■ **Weatherization:** Seal cracks around windows and

doors. Caulk joints between window frames or around door frames.

"Anywhere you have pipes coming into the house, like a dryer vent, should be checked," Burton said.

If windows are not properly insulated, consider covering them with plastic. Local home centers and hardware stores sell kits to insulate windows.

Don't forget basement windows, said Jay Solomon, an engineer with the University of Illinois Extension.

"A lot of air comes through my basement windows," he said. He suggests covering them with plastic.

Another source of drafts is through electrical outlets on outside walls. There are kits especially made to insulate them. Doors, too, should be checked. If you can push a quarter through the bottom of the door and the doorjamb, you need weatherstripping.

In many homes, money is going through the roof with insufficient insulation. This is especially true with older homes, said Solomon. The higher the R-value of the insulation, the less energy it will take to heat or cool.

He also suggested an insulation blanket for the water heater tank to improve its efficiency.

■ **Pipes and faucets:** Pipes in unheated areas like a basement or crawl space may need to be protected with heat tape. And outdoor faucets are especially prone to freezing and breaking during cold winters.

"Never leave hoses on outside faucets," Burton said.

Shutting off outside faucets and draining them is the best way to prevent freezing. Solomon said there are covers that can be purchased to fit over the spigots to help protect the pipes from freezing.

■ **Inspect chimneys and fireplaces:** Another job that should be done annually is checking and cleaning the fireplace and chimney. This task should also be left to a qualified person.

"When you burn wood, creosote can build up inside the chimney," said Burton. "This has the potential to catch on fire. A chimney sweep will clean the creosote out and check for cracks."

When not in use, keep the damper closed to prevent heated air from escaping up the chimney. And if the fireplace is never used, consider sealing the chimney flue.

While winterizing your home, check the batteries in the smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector, Burton said. She also advised keeping an emergency heat-supply source on hand in case the electricity goes out on a cold winter night.

Effects of rain, humidity can continue damage during winter

BY DAVID BRADLEY
The Associated Press

So, you took advantage of low interest rates to jump into the housing market.

Get ready to jump again — into seasonal home repairs. As you gushed and doted over your new home, summer heat and moisture quietly took a toll.

Rain and humidity made a forced entry in and around wood, drywall and concrete. Once these twin opportunists gain a toehold, even minor problems can exert major pressure on your fix-it skills — and checkbook — as winter picks up the attack on vulnerable portions of your home.

As David Steed of Lowe's sees it, there's a big difference between the words "repair" and "replace."

"If you can fix a problem now, do it," he said. "Repair is cheaper than replacement."

He suggests a thorough examination of the house from the top down. Roof and gutters first, followed by windows and siding. Last, but not least, are sidewalks and driveways.

Most roof damage is caused by poor attic ventilation. Daytime attic temperatures can spike above 140F. Trapped humidity and stifling heat effectively "cook" shingles, plywood and support timbers.

Steed said one solution is easily installed power roof ventilators from \$39 to \$99. High temperatures trigger the ventilators automatically. Replace warped and cracked shingles before icy temperatures force frozen

water through cracks and under shingles.

Steed said new technology "offers hope against persistently clogged gutters." Severe Weather Gutter systems, about \$1.60 per running foot, prevent accumulation of debris and can handle up to several inches of rain per hour. The system, which tucks beneath the first layer of shingles, staves off formation of ice dams.

Otherwise, clean gutters repeatedly of debris and mud with a power sprayer or brush.

Gutters often pull away from soffits because of the weight of ice and snow. Take a look at new gutter hanger systems to address this problem.

Shut out cold air and moisture around windows with a fresh application of caulk.

Summer moisture can cause fiber or wood siding to swell, warp, split and blister. This moisture can also migrate to interior walls if not held in check. Replace entire boards that are beyond repair. Use a good primer before you brush or spray a final coat, or two, of latex house paint on new boards.

Another new product — with a rocket-science sounding name of XYPEX HD-150 — seals concrete sidewalks, porches and driveways. Fill cracks to avoid winter freeze-thaw-freeze cycles. Small crevices quickly become chasms or cause concrete to heave or crumble. Quikrete Mortar Repair mixes with water and sets up in 30 to 40 minutes to replace eroded mortar between bricks or masonry.



AP Photo/David Bradley

Winter will have its way with both peeling paint and woodwork. Scrape the paint to bare wood and apply a sealant primer and at least one final coat of paint. A bead of caulk at the bottom will help deter moisture, too.



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