

A regular program of home maintenance is a good idea for any home and helps extend the life of your home indefinitely.

By taking care of these things once a month, your home will run more smoothly and repairs will be less frequent (and less surprising, too).

Here are some good maintenance tips to take care of your home this Winter.

- Dust the ceiling fan blades**, both on the tops and on the edge.
- Dust the tops of vanity lights** in bathrooms. The top sides of vanity lights are dust magnets. Never use a wet cloth to clean a hot bulb; it will explode. A once-a-month dusting with a dry rag will eliminate the need for a wet cleaning.
- Check for leaky faucets** in kitchen and bathroom(s). Replace washers as necessary.
- Sink and tub stoppers should be flushed** with hot water and baking soda.
- The undersides and ribs of sink drain plugs can become coated with slime** and turn black with mold growth. Release the plug from underneath the sink and give it a good soak in vinegar.
- Black mold takes time to grow and the toilet reservoir** makes a great hiding place. Remove the lid, drain the water, and give it a thorough swipe with cleaner or a spray with disinfectant. Once the mold takes hold, even bleach may not work.
- Make sure to change the filter in your furnace unit monthly.** This is important whenever the system is running, winter or summer. A dirty filter slows down the airflow through the system and creates many performance problems.
- Not only should you check and change your heating system filters on a regular basis, but you should also **check your unit's overall condition.** Are all hoses in good condition?
- Contact a professional to clean and service your furnace if you haven't already.** Now is the perfect time! You'll not only ensure your furnace is ready for the cold weather but you won't have to worry about it breaking down unexpectedly on the coldest day of the year!
- Try to stay on top of carpeting stains by spot cleaning the high traffic areas.** The same applies to throw rugs. Interim treating will prolong the life of your floor coverings until you get to the deep cleaning.
- Check basement walls and floor for dampness.** Be sure to clean your dehumidifier regularly, if you have one.
- Check windows and doors to make sure locks work properly** and that they are in good condition. Clean tracks and lubricate hinges. Repair or replace any cracked windows.
- Inspect window screens** for holes and repair or replace.
- Clean the clothes dryer exhaust duct and space under the dryer.** Remove all lint, dust and pieces of material. Dryer exhausts that have lint build-up are the #1 fire hazard in your home.
- Inspect washing machine hoses periodically** and replace hoses that show signs of leaking.
- Electrical wiring issues** will be a job for professionals, but you can find out quickly if any problems exist in your outlets by testing the ground fault interrupters (GFI). Locate each GFCI, push the test button and then reset it. If the test button does not trigger, replace the outlet - or contact a professional - immediately.
- Your smoke detector** is another one of those items that is easy to forget about, but can play a huge role in an emergency. Test your battery every month and replace if necessary.

IMPORTANT indoor holiday lighting safety tips:

- ❑ Check all light strands for cracked or broken plugs, frayed insulation, or bare wires. Worn cords can cause fires. Discard damaged sets of lights.
- ❑ Route cords inside your home so that they won't trip anyone. Don't place them under rugs, furniture, or other appliances. If covered, cords can overheat or become frayed and cause a fire.
- ❑ Follow the manufacturer's limits for the number of light strings that you can safely connect together.
- ❑ Use approved lights only; lights should have the Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) label.
- ❑ Don't plug more than three standard-sized sets of lights into a single extension cord. It puts too much of an electrical load on the cord, posing a fire risk. If you use a lot of lights for your decorations you should consider adding additional outlets.
- ❑ Always turn off decorative indoor lights when leaving the house and before going to bed.

We hope you have a safe and happy Holiday Season!