

# LIVING GREEN NEWS

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## Home Preventative Maintenance:

With cold weather right around the corner, this is a good time to start some basic preventative maintenance on your home. As temperatures begin to dip, your home will require maintenance to keep it in tip-top shape through the winter and every season. With this issue of the Living Green News and in the next few issues, we will cover several tips on what to do and why.

### 1) Furnace/HVAC Inspection

- Call an HVAC professional to inspect your furnace or HVAC unit and clean ducts.
  - ▲ A heating/cooling system that is not maintained is a problem waiting to happen. At the very least, energy costs could increase due to inefficient use of fuel and the eventual need for repairs. In the worst case, improperly maintained equipment may create safety issues by causing dangerously high levels of CO, resulting in injury or even death.
  - ▲ Cleaning the ducts to your HVAC system can:
    - ✓ Provide you with better indoor air quality
    - ✓ Reduce the presence of house molds and allergens
    - ✓ Help reduce house dust
    - ✓ Result in more airflow and better delivery of warm and cool air
    - ✓ Reduce energy costs.
- Stock up on furnace filters and change them monthly.
  - ▲ Failing to check the filter regularly can be costly: dust and dirt can work their way into the blower and coil assemblies, reducing the furnace's operating efficiency and eventually damaging the motor.
  - ▲ In fact, heating technicians say more than half of their service calls are caused by simple dust and dirt clogging up vital motor parts!
  - ▲ Most dealers and Home Centers recommended changing disposable filters once a month or cleaning reusable filters every other month.
- Consider switching out your thermostat for a programmable thermostat.
  - ▲ Installing a programmable thermostat is one of the simplest things you can do to save energy and money in your home. You'll save one percent on your heating bills for every degree it's set back over an eight-hour period! They can also be programmed for different temperatures for different

times of the day and night. Let's site a couple of examples:

- ✓ You can program it to keep the temperature lower (in winter) or higher (in summer) during the day, while everyone is at work or school, and to automatically change to a more comfortable temperature when everyone is due to come home.
- ✓ It can also be programmed for a different temperature during the hours you are sleeping and to automatically change to a more comfortable temperature about the time you get up in the morning.

We suggest you hire a professional to do the installation. Some are more difficult than others to install and unless you know what you are doing you could cause your system to malfunction.

- Some older homes are heated by hot water and/or steam systems.
  - ▲ Once a year, the entire hot water and steam system should be flushed to keep the pipes clear and the water flowing freely. Rust build up can cause problems to the system and eventually major repairs. Call a professional to flush the system.
- Remove all flammable material from the area surrounding your furnace or heat exchanger. Don't plant shrubbery or plants too close to your outdoor HVAC system or Heat Pump.
  - ▲ Flammable material can cause spontaneous combustion resulting in a fire.
  - ▲ Shrubby or plants close to your outdoor HVAC system or Heat Pump will rob the necessary air needed to allow your system to function properly. This can cause the system to work much harder and parts or the system itself, to wear out much sooner than it should.

### 2) Get the Fireplace Ready

- Cap or screen the top of the chimney.
  - ▲ A Cap Keeps Out The Rain
    - ✓ If this were the only reason for installing a cap it would be enough. It is very seldom that an uncapped chimney, over five years old, was not suffering from some kind of water damage. Go to your fireplace and look at the back firewall near the base. Take a screwdriver or coin and run it across the mortar in the bricks. Seem a little

crumbly? Or maybe it's obvious just looking at it. Rain puddles upon the smoke shelf, mixes with creosote in the chimney and turns into a highly corrosive acid. It then seeps down and attacks the mortar joints on the back wall of the fireplace. It becomes weak and the bricks, on that wall, come loose. Besides that:

- ✓ Rain soaks into the mortar joints in the flue. When it freezes it expands eroding and weakening the mortar bands and, thus, the whole chimney. Such a chimney becomes very weak with time.
- ✓ Rain can set off a bad smell in the chimney. This will happen in warm weather, especially if the chimney is dirty or has bird droppings on the shelf.
- ✓ If yours is a metal firebox you can plan on replacing it in 5-10 years, if it doesn't have a cap. You won't see the rust until the damage is done because it starts from the back and eats through to the front. By the time you see the rust, it's time to replace the firebox, and that will cost you a fortune.
- ✓ If you have a wood stove insert in your fireplace, the rain will cause it to rust rapidly. Heat greatly increases the rate of oxidation (rusting). The continuous operation of the stove mixed with the water will cause this process to take place much faster than normal.

#### ▲ A Cap Keeps Out The Birds, Squirrels, And Other Vermin

- ✓ Birds will nest in your chimney blocking the air flow, causing smoke to backup into your house. Smoke damage can ruin your carpet, sofa and other furniture. Rodents can get stuck in the chimney or even enter you house through the chimney. Have you ever tried to remove a live rodent from your house? They can be nasty or even dangerous.
- If the chimney hasn't been cleaned for a while, call a chimney sweep to remove soot and creosote (he can also inspect the fireplace damper and the mortar between the bricks – the next two steps – so you won't have to do these on your own)
  - ▲ It goes without saying; a fire in the chimney can be very dangerous. It can damage the house considerably if allowed to get out of control. A chimney fire burns so hot (sometimes in excess of 2,000°) that it can crack the flue tiles and spread to other parts of the house. The brickwork itself can radiate enough heat to ignite paneling or surrounding woodwork. The fire can melt mortar from the chimney joints and send it flying into the air like a roman candle with red hot pieces falling

on your roof and that of your neighbors.

- Inspect the fireplace damper for proper opening and closing.
  - ▲ Pull down and push up on the damper handle inside the fireplace box and look to see that it opens and closes fully. If it doesn't check to see if something is blocking it. If so, remove the blockage. If you still have a problem, call a professional to assist you. You may have a more serious problem.
- Check the mortar between bricks
  - ▲ The need to repair a mortar joint is more common than having to replace a brick. The mortar joint plays a significant role in the structure and structural integrity of the fireplace wall. It holds the bricks together; it bears the weight of the wall just as the bricks do. If you have damaged mortar joints (loose mortar, flaking or missing mortar) call a professional to repair it before you build a fire.
- Buy firewood or chop wood. Store it in a dry place away from the exterior of your home.
  - ▲ Insects, especially termites, love to live in and eat wood. Storing firewood next to exterior of your home is an invitation for them to move from the firewood to your home and continue their path of destruction.

***If your home will be vacant for any length of time, consider following these tips in addition to the ones listed above and those we will publish in future issues:***

1. If you have a swimming pool, close it or hire a professional to do it.
2. If you can reach it safely, disconnect your home's small satellite dish and store it indoors. Thieves look for homes that have no activity over a period of time. If the dish is easy access, it will be gone by the time you come back.
3. Store lawn furniture, grills, tools, and other items inside. If that isn't possible, cover with plastic and secure them in a protected location. You never know when a storm will come up with high winds and you don't want these items to fly away or become projectiles. Who knows where they will end up or what damage they can do to your home or your neighbors?
4. Clean your home's refrigerator thoroughly. Unplug it, and prop the door open. This will keep mold and mildew from building up in it. Unplug other appliances. Of course, this only applies if you are going away for a long time.
5. Consider turning off water at the main line, even if your home is in a warm climate. No one will be home to find plumbing leaks. If you don't do this, at least make sure all the facets in the house are turned

completely off. Turn the water off to your washing machine. These are the hot and cold water valves in the wall behind the machine. There is always water pressure in the hoses and you would be surprised at the number of homes where these hoses burst while no one is home. For the same reason as with the washing machine, turn the water off to your dishwasher. This can normally be found under the kitchen sink and is either a separate valve or connected to the hot water line. If you have an ice maker in your freezer, flip the bar up to stop making ice. Can you imagine what your water bill would be, when you get home, if any of these lines burst? This doesn't even consider what kind of damage water will do to your flooring, carpet, or furniture! One last thing, if you have an electric hot water system, you can shut it off by turning the circuit breaker off, which is located in your electrical panel. But only do this if you know exactly which circuit breaker to turn off. Do not try to adjust a gas hot water system on your own!! This is very dangerous and could cause a gas leak or even an explosion over time. If the house will be vacant for a long period of time, have the Gas Company come in and make the necessary adjustments to the system.

6. If your home will be empty during cold months, hire a professional to winterize the plumbing. If that is not possible,
7. Turn the thermostat down to 55 degrees. It is important to keep your home heated to keep pipes from freezing and bursting. Even if you have turned off the water, there will be some water remaining in the pipes.
8. It's a good idea to connect some of your lights to timers. Don't set all of them to come on and go off at the same time each day. Set the living room to come on and go off at one interval, the kitchen for another, the bedroom for another, etc. From the outside, this makes it look like someone is home and discourages burglars.
9. Make arrangements to continue pest inspections and pest treatments if necessary.
10. Notify the Postal Service to forward your mail or hold it until you get back. Stop newspaper delivery.
11. If you have a trusted neighbor, give them a key to your house and ask them to keep an eye on things and check the inside of the house at least once a week. Let them know what steps you have taken, from the above list, so they know what to check for. Don't forget to give them the code, if you have an alarm system.

12. If you do have an alarm system, notify your security company that you will be gone, how long, a phone number to reach you at, and that your neighbor will be checking the house periodically.
13. It's also a good idea to let the local police department know. Ask them to drive by your house once in a while and let them know if a neighbor will be in and out of the house from time to time. It would be wise to let them know that you have set lights on various timers throughout the house.

### **Interesting Fact:**

The largest pearl on record is called the Pearl of Allah. It weighs 14 pounds and was discovered in a giant clam in the Palawan Sea in 1934.

### **On the Lighter Side:**

- ✓ There is one great advantage to living to 105 – no peer pressure
- ✓ The simplest toy, one which even the youngest child can operate, is called a grandparent.
- ✓ The best way out is always through.

### **Quotable Quote:**

**“Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy.”**

**Norman Vincent Peale**