

# Prepare to ward off winter's bluster

The brisk, sunny days of autumn are an ideal time to prepare your house for winter. In the months to come, you'll be happy that you did.

Working on weekends, you should be able to attend to most of the following home maintenance tasks before the snow falls. Home Products Guide magazine says that taking steps now will pay off in lower heating bills and greater personal comfort when the real cold weather arrives:

■ **Tighten up air leaks.** Leaky windows could account for as much as 35 percent of your home's heat loss this winter. Check your windows on a windy day by moving a lighted candle around the window edges. While tacked-on spring metal weather stripping lasts the longest, self-stick foam, and stapled rolled vinyl and felt are easier to install. Narrow spaces between the top and bottom sashes can be filled with interior roller caulk. One inexpensive way to reduce air infiltration through old or loose windows is to cover windows on the inside using double-stick tape and insulative shrink film. If there are only a few ways to exit your house in case of fire, your safest solution may be storm windows that can be opened quickly.

These interior weather-stripping steps generate few savings when gaps and cracks in your home's exterior are left unattended. Check around door and window frames and wherever dissimilar materials meet, such as at framing and foundation. Clean out any old caulk or sealant and replace with new; check packages for which type suits your needs. Remember to wear gloves and wash up carefully afterward.

■ **Give your heating system a checkup.** If your furnace is a forced-air unit, you can do your own routine maintenance. All forced-air units rely on a blower and a system of ducts to circulate air. Just as in your car, when your furnace's air filter becomes clogged with dirt, the

entire system suffers. To check your filter, slip it out and hold it up to a light. If you can't see the light through the filter, replace it. Some furnaces use a cleanable, dry-foam filter; vacuum or hose it and return it to the furnace. Changing filters regularly does wonders for your heating system and your budget.

If your blower motor has oiling ports at each end, oil them with a few drops of high-grade motor oil. Also, remove any dust and dirt on the motor's housing. Before working on your furnace blower, make sure the power is off at the master control panel. For belt-driven blowers, check the belt for signs of wear. Tighten the belt if necessary by adjusting the motor belt pulley.

Other types of furnaces should be inspected and overhauled before each heating system begins. Check with fuel companies and heating equipment repair services in your area for pre-season specials on this service. Finally, check that room registers and the central cold-air return are dust free.

If it's been a long time since you had your fireplace cleaned, use a flashlight to check that the flue is clear, that the damper seals tightly, and the bricks in your firebox are secure, and that there is a minimum of dangerous soot and creosote buildup. This is a special problem when you regularly burn soft or unseasoned wood. Hire a chimney sweep to dislodge this buildup and inspect the chimney itself for gaps and cracks. Openings too numerous to patch may require chimney relining.

On your own, remove ashes that have accumulated in the metal cleanout door, usually located outside at the base of the chimney. Check that the door closes tightly to keep out drafts and small creatures.

■ **Winterize your plumbing.** Even if your pipes have never frozen before, there's no guar-

antee that it won't happen this winter. A simple change — such as lowering the temperature a few degrees to save on fuel bills, or fixing a dripping faucet — can cause a pipe to freeze for the first time.

As you survey your home's plumbing system, look closely at the hot and cold supply pipes running through exterior walls. Also note exposed supply pipes that run along or through exterior walls in an unheated basement or crawlspace. One way to safeguard exposed pipes is to wrap electric heat tape around them. Plug one end of the tape into an outlet. A thermostat turns the tape on and off as needed. Keep in mind, however, that the tape won't work during power outages. Another method of protecting exposed pipes is to insulate them. Slip foam pipe jackets over the pipes or bundle them in fiberglass insulation. Secure both types of insulation with duct tape.



Timely reminder: Tend to buttoning up your house before the snow flies.

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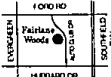
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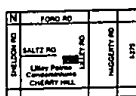
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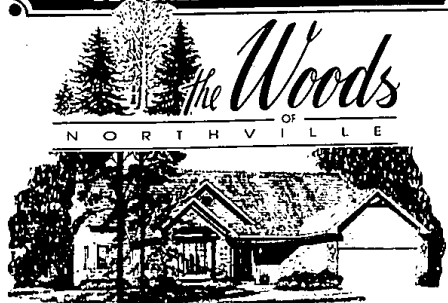
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