

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup

Your monthly budget should include money for routine maintenance and repair for the house and yard, as well as money set aside to accumulate for large, irregular expenses that normally occur as a house ages. Large expenses include interior and exterior painting, repairs or replacement of heating and air conditioning units and appliances, floor coverings, and roof surfaces. Housing experts recommend allowing **from 1-3% of the market value of the house** each year for maintenance and repair costs. While all of these funds may not be needed when a house is new, the accumulated amounts will be needed for large expenses such as re-roofing or heating unit replacement.

Home maintenance is an important factor in providing a healthy, safe environment as well as continuing protection to a growing financial investment. It is much easier to prevent the development of unsafe, unhealthy conditions and structural damage than to pay medical and/or repair bills.

Regular inspections of a house will alert the owner to items needing maintenance or repair. Assign each area for a particular month in order to break the job into manageable size and ensure regular inspection of each area. Some areas are easier to inspect and do maintenance work in the spring, some in summer, and others in fall or winter months. Start at the base of the house and work upward and inward and include all environmental control systems and services. The following checklist should be included in an inspection.

FOUNDATIONS, BASEMENTS, GROUNDS, YARDS

- Check grading around the house to be sure that water will drain away from the house on all

sides. The CABO building code requires that in new construction "The grade away from the foundation walls shall fall a **minimum of 6 inches within the first 10 feet**, except as restricted by lot lines where the fall will be a minimum of 6 inches regardless of the horizontal distance available." This equals a 5% slope.

- Check masonry foundation walls for cracks.
- Examine main support beams, support columns, and floor joists for evidence of bowing or warping.
- Check wood structural members such as joists, beams, columns with a screwdriver or pocket knife to be sure wood is solid and free from decay.
- Check the inside and outside of all foundation walls and piers for termite tubes and any damage that may have been done by termites.
- Check crawl space vapor barrier for good condition and correct placement.
- Examine the inside of basement walls for dampness or water stains indicating seepage or a leak.
- In most of the state, water lines and hose bibs need some freeze protection or winter drainage. Garden hoses should be drained and stored for the winter.
- Clean leaves and debris from around an outside heating/air conditioning condenser and trim back shrubs that may block air movement around the house.
- Yard care power equipment should have fuel drained out and be serviced according to manufacturer's instructions for readiness for the next season.
- Doorway and window wells as well as any storm drains should be cleaned out if debris or leaves have filled or blocked them.
- Driveways and walks should be checked for cracks, breaks or erosion that may damage

them. Asphalt surfaces are quite susceptible to deterioration from standing water where drainage is not adequate. Asphalt is also damaged from petroleum products, such as gasoline and oil drippings. When contracting for sealing asphalt, choose a reputable contractor.

Unrepaired cracks in concrete can lead to further damage.

- Clean and repair garden equipment. Remove all dirt and rust, then store in dry area to prevent rust. Winter is a good time to file rough spots on hoes and shovels and to apply linseed oil to handles of garden tools. Thoroughly rinse pesticide and herbicide sprayers to prevent clogging and rinse fertilizer spreaders to prevent corrosion.
- An adequately sized septic tank needs little attention. However, now and then check the space between the scum at the top and sludge at the bottom. When the space becomes less than one-half of the total depth of the tank, cleaning is advisable.
- Fences, gates, and retaining walls should be checked for ease of operation, condition of structure, and materials. Needed repairs should be done.
- Leftover materials such as pesticides, weed killers, and fungicides should be checked for expiration dates and container condition. Any old materials or those in poor condition should be disposed of safely and any retained should be locked in a cool, dry cabinet.

EXTERIOR WALLS, WINDOWS, AND DOORS

- Check bricks or blocks for cracked mortar or loose joints.
- Check painted surfaces for paint failure, water damage or mildew.
- Examine all trim for tightness of fit, damage, and decay.
- Check the condition of caulking where two different materials meet, where wood siding joins the foundation wall, at inside corners, and where window and door trim meets the siding.
- Check the glazed openings for loose putty around the glass panes.
- Check for broken or cracked glass and damaged screens or storm windows.

- Examine all hardware on windows and doors and lubricate moving parts.
- Check weatherstripping on windows and doors for damage and tightness of fit.

ROOF

- Trim back tree branches that scrape against or overhang the roof. Keep branches away from chimney to avoid fire hazard and ensure proper draft for correct chimney operation.
- Check for curled, damaged, loose or missing shingles on roofs.
- Check the lower edge of roof sheathing for water damage.
- Examine all roof flashing and around chimneys, vent stacks and roof edges, dormers, and skylights.
- Check vents and louvers for free air movement. Clean screens and remove bird nests, spiders, insects, and dust.
- Check for damaged gutters, downspouts, hangers, and strainers. If needed, clean out gutters and downspouts. Are they free from leaks and rust? Check the condition of paint on gutters.
- Examine antenna guy wires and support straps.

INTERIOR SURFACES

- Check all ceilings and walls for dirt and finish failure.
- Check for cracks where ceilings and walls join and where moldings join ceilings and walls.
- Check for visible or odor evidence of mildew or mold growing.
- Check for finish failure around cabinet pulls.
- Examine all joints in ceramic tiles and laminated plastics.
- Check caulking around sinks, bathtubs, and showers. Some types of caulking become brittle with age, and therefore useless as a water seal. New caulking in such locations should be a long-lasting resilient material such as silicone or latex sealant.
- Check all floors for wear and damage. Check particularly where one type of flooring material meets another (i.e., where carpet or wood joins tile, etc.).

ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS AND FIXTURES

- Check the condition of lamp cords, extension cords, and plugs. Also examine all appliance cords and plugs (i.e., vacuum, iron, mixer, washer, dryer, etc.).
- If you have a fuse that blows often or a circuit breaker that trips frequently, call an electrician to determine the cause and make the repair.
- If, when inspecting any appliance or lamp, a slight tingling shock comes from handling it, disconnect the appliance and repair it.
- Check places where wiring is exposed (the attic) examining it for exposed wires and cracked insulation of wires. Replace any in poor condition.
- In new homes fitted with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFI's) in outlets near sinks, laundry, shop, and garage, check GFI's monthly and after electrical storms.

HEATING AND COOLING SYSTEMS

- Have heating and cooling systems checked by a qualified serviceman once per year, or according to the manufacturer's warranty and service recommendations. Failure to do manufacturer-recommended servicing may void warranties.
- Clean or replace filters. See owner's manual for recommended procedures and frequency, which may be as often as monthly.
- Clean dirt and dust from around furnaces, air grills, and ducts.
- Regularly clean out fireplace ash pit.
- Check chimney wash, cap, mortar and bricks and cricket if any. Check liner condition and entire flue for creosote and soot build-up. Seek help from professional fire fighters or chimney inspectors if in doubt as to chimney safety. Chimney flues should be cleaned annually if wood burners are used for heating.
- Check attic to be sure insulation or other material is not blocking free air flow through soffit vents, gable vents, or other attic vents. Exterior light coming through each vent into darkened attic indicates unblocked vents.

PLUMBING SYSTEMS

- Check faucets, hose bibs, and water closets for leaks. Also look for leaks at shut-off valves at sinks, water closet, laundry, and main water shut-off valve.
- In a basement or crawl space house, pull back floor insulation to check for leaks and wood damage around water supply pipes, drains, and water closet.
- Check sinks, tubs, and showers for proper drainage. Remove hair from drains. When necessary, use only those drain cleaners approved for the drainpipe material in your house.
- Check the pressure relief valve on the water heater. Open it to see that it is working.

SAFETY SYSTEMS

- Test smoke alarm and heat alarm systems at least monthly. Replace weak batteries.
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy for use in kitchen and near any wood-burning stove or fireplace. Check extinguisher gauge for proper pressure.
- Keep flashlight(s) maintained for emergency use.
- Keep outside security lighting in good repair. Lighting exterior grounds helps discourage prowlers.

Regularly inspecting and maintaining a home will help you keep it in good condition, thereby maintaining its value. Doing maintenance and repair as the need arises also helps prevent small problems from becoming bigger, more costly problems.

Having and following a plan for home maintenance and repair will help make the job easier. In turn, your house will be a comfortable home in which to live.

REFERENCE:

Wanslow, Robert. *Maintaining the Home*. Circular A1.5. Champaign, Illinois: Small Homes Council-Building Research Council, 1969.

Other sources of information helpful to the homeowner:

Becker, Norman. *The Complete Book of Home Inspection*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980.

Griffin, Barbara. *SC Buyer's Minimum Structural House Inspection Guide*. Clemson, SC: Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, 1990.

Complete Guide To Home Repair, Maintenance and Improvement. Des Moines, Iowa: Better Homes and Gardens Books, Meredith Corporation, 1980.

Series of five VHS videotapes on identifying, preventing, and correcting moisture problems in homes. Tapes and coordinating leaflets have the same title. Leaflets are as follows, and all are available from the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, as are a number of other leaflets on aspects of home moisture damage:

HL 239 *The Billion Dollar Thief*

HL 240 *There's No Future In A Wet Foundation*

HL 241 *Plan It Well; Build It Right; Keep It Forever*

HL 242 *The BMW* Complex (*Bugs, Moisture, Wood)*

HL 243 *There's No Such Thing As Dry Rot*

Redmann, Linda L. HL 234. *Landscape Management Checklist: Preventing Home Moisture Damage*. Clemson, SC: Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, 1991.

Redmann, Linda L. HL 235. *Home Management Checklist: Preventing Home Moisture Damage*. Clemson, SC: Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, 1991.

The following VHS videotapes are available on loan through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service:

From Roof to Foundation. 30 minutes, color. Champaign, Illinois: Cooperative Extension Service and Small Homes Council, University of Illinois, 1989.

House Inspection: Taking A Closer Look. 19:30 minutes, color. College Station, Texas: Cooperative Extension Service, Texas A & M University, 1988.

Prepared by Linda L. Redmann, Ph.D., C.H.E., Extension Residential Housing Specialist, Department of Home Economics, and Barbara J. Griffin, Extension Residential Housing Specialist, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering.