

READY FOR WINTER?

Even mild North Carolina winters can bring ice storms, power outages and higher utility bills. After we pack away the Halloween decorations but before we bring out our cornucopias and Christmas trees, we have chores to do to prepare for the cold north winds. Here's a checklist to get your house ready for winter.

LOCATE AIR LEAKS

Cold drafts not only make you uncomfortable but also increase your utility bills. Sealing and insulating your home can save 20 percent on heating and cooling costs. Check these areas to find your home's air leaks.

- Behind knee walls
- Attic hatch
- Wiring holes
- Plumbing vent
- Open soffit (the box that hides the recessed lights)
- Recessed light
- Furnace flue or duct chaseway (the hollow box or wall feature that hides ducts)
- Basement rim joists (where the foundation meets the wood framing)
- Windows and doors
- Look for dirty insulation, an indication that air is moving through it.

ELIMINATE AIR LEAKS

- Use unfaced fiberglass batt or roll insulation to stuff open stud cavities behind kneewalls and in dropped soffits.
- Use reflective foil insulation, drywall or pieces of rigid foam insulation to cover soffits, open walls and larger holes.
- Use silicone or acrylic latex caulk for sealing small holes $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or less.
- Use expanding spray foam insulation for filling larger gaps ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch to 3 inches). Use only special high-temperature (heat-resistant) caulk to seal around flues and chimneys.
- Caution: Some attics have vermiculite insulation which may contain asbestos, a health hazard. Vermiculite is a lightweight, pea-size, flaky gray mineral. Don't disturb vermiculite insulation unless you've had it tested by an approved lab to be sure it doesn't contain asbestos.
- Check the Energy Star website for more tips on sealing attic air leaks and for safety tips.

GETTING THE FIREPLACE READY

- Hire a professional to remove soot and creosote.
- Store firewood in a dry place away from the exterior of your home.
- Inspect the fireplace damper for proper opening and closing.
- Check the mortar between bricks.

CHECK THE HOME'S EXTERIOR, DOORS AND WINDOWS

- Look for cracks and exposed entry points around pipes, sealing any that you find.
- Rake away debris and edible vegetation from the foundation.
- Inspect sill plates for dry rot or pest infestation.
- Secure crawlspace entrances.
- Use weather-stripping around doors and caulk windows.
- If you need to replace doors or windows, check for federal tax credit eligibility.
- If your house has a basement, consider protecting its window wells by covering them with plastic shields.
- Remove and store screens. If you have storm windows, install them.

INSPECT ROOF, GUTTERS & DOWNSPOUTS

- Check flashing to ensure water cannot enter the home.
- Replace worn roof shingles or tiles. • Clean out the gutters and use a hose to spray water in the downspouts to clear away debris.
- Consider installing leaf guards on the gutters or extensions on the downspouts to direct water away from the home.

INSTALL/CHECK SMOKE AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

- Buy extra smoke detector batteries and change them when daylight savings ends.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector near your furnace and/or water heater.
- Test the smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to make sure they work.
- Buy a fire extinguisher or replace an extinguisher older than 10 years.

PREVENT PLUMBING FREEZES

- Find your water main in the event that you need to shut it off in an emergency.
- Drain all garden hoses.
- Insulate exposed plumbing pipes.
- Drain air conditioner pipes and, if your air conditioner has a water shut-off valve, turn it off.
- If you go on vacation, leave the heat on, set to at least 55 degrees.

PREPARE LANDSCAPING & OUTDOOR SURFACES

- Trim trees where branches are too close to the house or electrical wires. Check with a gardener, gardening books or your cooperative extension agent (375-5876) for best times to prune trees and shrubbery.
- Plant spring flower bulbs.
- Seal driveways, brick patios and wood decks.
- Move sensitive potted plants indoors.

PREPARE AN EMERGENCY KIT

- Buy candles, matches and/or lighter.
- Find phone numbers for utility companies and tape it inside the phone book.

- Buy a battery back up to protect your computer and sensitive electronic equipment.
- Store extra bottled water and non-perishable food supplies — including supplies for your pets.
- Buy or assemble a first aid kit, including all essential medications.
- Put aside extra blankets or sleeping bags.
- Prepare an evacuation plan in the event you must leave your home.

Sources: energystar.gov, National Safety Council; North Carolina Emergency Management; Weather.com



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