

As winter approaches with its guarantee of ice, snow, and frigid temperatures, you should begin to take action early to prepare and protect your home for the season. It's never too soon to start taking into consideration the numerous tasks that need to be done. You're better off preventing any potential problems ahead of time because once the chill of winter arrives anything that goes wrong in your home will inevitably be nothing but a headache to fix. Careful planning and preparation will ensure your utilities will run efficiently during the winter, and in the end save you time, money, and a whole world of frustration. Outlined here are the major steps you should take to keep your winter home warm, comfortable, and safe.

HEATING

First and foremost, it's very important to have a professional come inspect and service your heating unit each year before you begin to use it. This is done to ensure that your heater is both safe and functional. The earlier you arrange an appointment with a licensed heating professional the better, as they are liable to be booked up as the season approaches. You certainly don't want to take the risk of your furnace breaking down on you during icy winter weather. The professional will perform maintenance tasks to keep your heater performing optimally during a standard check-up.

INSULATE PIPES TO PREVENT FREEZING

As the winter approaches, you should make every effort you can to prevent the risk of your pipes freezing, which can cause a blockage of your water supply, and in the worst case, lead to the breaking of your pipes. When pipes freeze the flow of the water is completely blocked. As water expands as it turns into ice, the pipes are very likely to burst. This can be an expensive problem to fix, and a disastrous occurrence in the frigid winter months. Not only outdoor pipes can freeze, pipes that may run along exterior walls or crawl spaces that are exposed to colder temperatures are at risk. Both hot and cold-water pipelines alike can freeze, so be sure to protect both.

Prevention: Begin to insulate your pipes early to prevent freezing, starting before freezing temperatures hit. You can insulate your pipes with foam rubber sleeves or fiberglass insulation, wrapping the insulating material around the pipes. For extra protection in the areas of your home that are not heated, pipes may first be wrapped with special heating strips, and then outer insulation wrapped on top of that.

If your home has faucets that are attached to the outside of your home, chances are that there is a turnoff valve somewhere on the pipe on the interior of your home. Turn off the water at this valve for the duration of the winter; if you do not have a switch, you should seriously consider installing one to save you trouble. Switch the valve shut, and then open the outside valve to drain out the remaining water. This will protect the pipes that lead to the outdoors from freezing.

Try to spot any trouble with your pipes before it's too late, keeping your eye out for signs that may signify pipes that are beginning to freeze. Is the water pressure becoming reduced? There is a good chance the water in your pipes is starting to freeze and you should take action immediately.

If there is an especially cold spell and you fear your pipes are going to freeze, despite what efforts you have taken, there is still a last-resort trick. Leave one of your faucets, farthest from the supply of your

home's water, open and running slightly. If the water is running, it will be less liable to freeze, and the flow of the water should also work to thaw wherever the water already may have frozen in the pipes. It might be a waste of water, but in an extreme case it is a better.

RUBBER WEATHER STRIPPING

Rubber weather stripping is a very durable material that goes around the outside of your door. It typically comes in a tube structure that is flexible. To install it, you may have to apply adhesive to the door frame, though some forms of weather stripping come with a self-adhesive already applied. Therefore, you may just have to pull off the protective paper and stick the weather stripping in place.

Installing rubber weather stripping can provide a number of benefits to a homeowner. Weather stripping around the outside of the door is necessary for several different reasons, including energy efficiency, which leads to savings.

Benefits

* **Energy Savings** - One of the major benefits of installing rubber weather stripping is that it can save you substantial amounts of energy. Putting this around the outside of the doors will prevent air from the outside from coming in. This will mean that your air conditioner or heater runs less. Therefore, this will result in a lower utility bill for you.

* **Easy Installation** - Rubber weather stripping is one of the easiest materials to install. All you will need is a knife to cut it with. Then just press it into place and you are done.

INSULATING AND SEALING UP YOUR HOME

One of the best ways to keep your home warm while keeping your bills down is ensuring that it is insulated and sealed as effectively as possible.

Attic: A well-insulated and ventilated attic will save you both on your heating bill and prevent ice dams. Consider adding a second layer of insulation to your attic. R-30 insulation is considered the minimum a home should have. Newer homes are more likely to conform to this minimum, but if your house is older it is probably time to add insulation.

Major amounts of heat can also be lost through cracks in the walls of your home, reducing the efficiency of your heating system and bumping up bills. Sealing your home up tight on both the interior and exterior is important to reduce the risk of drafts, leaks, dry rot, and mold.

Windows: Now is the time to install your storm windows and doors, replacing any screens in your home. It is especially important to have storm windows if the windows in your home are older and not constructed of modern insulated glass.

Look for cracks in your home around window frames, doors, pipes, and electrical outlets. You should seal up the open drafty cracks where air and wind can seep through as best as you can. On the interior, apply caulk around your window and door glass and trim. Other areas where cracks should be treated are around where the chimney and fireplace penetrate, and the gaps around the dryer, bath, and kitchen vents.

Exterior: Check the siding on your house's exterior, looking for cracks and gaps. Caulk and patch the cracks to prevent leaks and the damage that could result from them. Install or replace the weather stripping on all your windows and doors and any other areas where there are gaps. You can prime raw the siding of your house to temporarily waterproof it. You can seal brick exteriors with a high-quality masonry sealer in order to prevent the damage caused by the "freeze-thaw" process.

Fall is an ideal time to paint; however do not paint with latex paint when the temperature drops lower than 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

Please give me a call if you would like any of these recommendations performed on your house.