

Tips to get ready for winter

The Ontario Real Estate Association and your local Realtor offer the following advice to help you prepare your home for winter. It all starts with a careful, thorough inspection of the outside of your home and the areas that may need special attention. In some areas the maintenance you'll need to do can be relatively simple and done by yourself; in other cases you may need to call in a professional to deal with a problem.

Clear the eavestroughs

Eavestroughs that are blocked with leaves, bird's nests or other material can create problems for you during the winter. With lots of snow and freezing temperature, this debris can freeze and form ice dams in the troughs which will force water to back up under the shingles or down through the siding and eventually enter the house.

Clean material from the eavestrough carefully and make sure downspouts and joints are free of blockages by running a plumber's snake or a straightened out metal coathanger through them. Don't lean a ladder against the troughs; it may pull them out of alignment.

Check the chimney

Blocked chimney's can also cause many problems. Use a flashlight or a mirror on a sunny day to look down your chimney to check for blockages. If it needs cleaning to get ready of debris, soot or tar, a professional cleaner can do the job easily with a vacuum machine.

When you are inspecting the chimney make sure you look for mortar damage between the bricks, and spaces in the flashings around the flue or the base of the chimney. You may need to make some repairs by caulking the trouble spots.

Check your roof

While you're checking the chimney, take a close look at your roof. Damaged shingles should be replaced, and other small repairs made where necessary. Sometimes it's only possible to discover the damage through watermarks on ceilings inside your house.

While roofing usually stays in good shape for many years, as the house gets older you may want to ask a reputable roofing professional to do a thorough check to see whether you need major repairs. If they're needed, and they will be at some time, it's better to do them sooner than later.

Look for spaces in joints

Wherever two parts or different material come together on the outside of your home there is potential for damaging spaces that could let in water or drafts. Particularly check the areas around windows and doors, plumbing, exhaust and ventilation vents, roof/corner joints, foundation joints, etc..

Spaces in these areas need to be filled with caulking or putty. It's not a difficult job, and if you do it properly it can last for four or five years.

Insulate

Insulation, for the most part, is an inside job but keep it in mind when you are preparing your house for winter. Proper insulation can dramatically reduce your heating costs, and help make your home comfortable. Proper ventilation, combined with insulation, can lessen excess visible and hidden condensation which can be the cause of damage to your structure.

For homeowners now is the time to undertake these special maintenance jobs that will protect your home and keep you and your family warm and comfortable during the months ahead.



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