

SNOW- SHOVEL AROUND THE HOME NOW!

The number of calls I have already received on water in basements from melting snow is only going to increase over the next few weeks. I am surprised at the number of roof's that have collapsed. I had a chat with a climate specialist recently and he says that with the swings in weather, milder winters with more snow can almost be expected now. We have got to rethink how we handle a number of areas around the home.

If you have a home with a conventional furnace you can skip this tip, your furnace likely vents up a chimney. In a newer home or one that has been upgraded to a high efficiency furnace, the vast majority are vented out the side wall of your home. The general rule of thumb was to have them about a foot above the average snow level. The next question; what is our average snow level going to be? If your vent gets covered in snow the chances the furnace will quit or the exhaust gases will leak into your home is very good. Take a look at the location of these vents. Your heating company can raise them, it's called "snorkeling" and this is the best answer. Direct Vent Fireplaces are permitted to be located 16" from the ground. The answer here may be some form of "snow fence" approach along the side of the home where this appliance is vented.

The vast majority of basement windows at or near grade lack proper window wells, many builders fail to install these and they are important. Just as important is the installation of plastic "domes" over these window wells. A high percentage of builders fit the basement windows into the poured foundation cavities and never caulk them. Another opening is your patio door to the deck that has not been cleared of snow. With the snow buildup this year, many of these doors and windows are going to leak.

I've seen a number of newer homes this winter with icicles on the roof and that is a sure sign of a lack of ventilation. The "Mushroom" vent has been the vent choice for years; we may have to rethink this if they remain covered in snow for the majority of the winter. In my former life I recommended ridge venting for many reasons, one of which was I noted years ago that the roof ridge was often blown clear. The edge and ridge of a roof usually were the first to melt and allow the ridge vent to work. The Max-vent tower style vent system may be the alternative if you find your "mushroom" vents remain covered for the majority of the winter. While we are talking mushroom vents, these things are not weatherproof and this year there is a better than average possibility that these vents may leak into your attic. A look into your attic is a good idea to see if you have any snow or water issues on your insulation below these vents.

Once the thaw starts in earnest I strongly suggest you find the ends of your eavetrough downspouts and clear a path for them to drain. The possibility of ice buildup and blockage is excellent this year. This could cause the trough to fill up and freeze overnight, a few nights like this and you have an ice dam issue.

While you are outside looking at your home and making these corrections, pay close attention to how the snow has drifted around your home. Years ago some strategically placed "snow fencing" was very effective in stopping drifting snow. Some carefully located seasonal fencing may be worth considering next fall.

The calls to our office about water leaking into their basement have already started. I have stressed many times in this column that careful attention to the drainage and grades around your home is a major factor in keeping your basement dry. Even if you get thru this winter, attention to how the ground water drains from your home should be reviewed every year. Some well placed, tamped top soil, drainage openings in that nice flower bed that is set inside an artificial stone wall and removal of the plastic edging or set it so it's close to the grade are three corrections to the most common contributors of water ponding near a home. Take the time during a heavy spring rain, put your rain coat on and go for a walk around your home. You may be surprised where the water is laying around your house. These areas should be corrected as part of your summer garden improvements.

One last tip, there was a run on "roof rakes" this winter and many stores sold out. These rakes are very effective. I have "raked" my roof twice this winter. They run around 50.00 or so and if you are crossing your fingers right now with the heavy snow, I would pick one up during the summer; most stores will order them in. They are a lightweight aluminum snap together three or four section pole with a formed metal end. The rake reaches close to the ridge of a roof for most single story homes. They are not that heavy and it is certainly a lot safer clearing your roof from the ground!