

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR NOVEMBER 16, 2016  
HEADLINE: INSIDE CHECK LIST FOR WINTER

A number of readers ask for a check list at different times of the year and I also use one around my own home. The first thing on my winter list is service for the furnace. I get my name on the list with the heating company for them to come in August. They are usually busy by this time of the year so you can expect to wait if you call them now. We have an HRV installed and I clean the air filters every 6-8 weeks as part of general maintenance. I remove the core and clean it according to the manufacturer's recommendations every fall. Most HRV cores need to be done once a year. I put in a stock of furnace filters. I switched to the pleated style a few years ago and I was amazed how effective they are. They need to be watched, however, as they do fill up and need to be changed regularly. I have a supply of computer stickers by the furnace and, when I change the filter, I peel off one sticker and apply it to the duct going to the furnace and write the date on there. This reminds me when I changed it and, generally, it needs to be replaced around a month or six weeks later. I find that, in the summer, the cold ducting from the air conditioner allows me to peel these stickers off so that they don't build-up. Remove the floor grills on your air registers and slip your vacuum down into the pipe; a lot of dust builds up in this area. Check your detectors, both smoke and carbon monoxide, and, if they are not hard wired, replace the batteries. Drop the covers and give them a quick vacuum. Dust or cobwebs can prevent them from functioning properly. If you have a wood stove or fireplace it's time to call in your WETT certified sweep for an annual cleaning and check.

If you have ceiling fans and they have a reverse switch, as most do, then your blades should be running counter clock wise to push the warm air that has risen to the ceiling back down to the floor.

My next check is the weather-stripping around the windows and doors. I open every window and make sure any rubber seals are soft and pliable. One old trick is to use a tiny bit of petroleum jelly if they start to dry out. Put on a thin disposable glove and work the jelly into the rubber weather-stripping, then wipe off the excess and close the window slowly. If you have casement windows with dual locks, do the top lock first, give the crank another gentle tug and then do the bottom one. If you have slider windows, check the weather-strip where they overlap in the closed position. Weather-stripping around doors seems to take a beating and, if it is cut or flattened, replace this. The style that has a spring track with a vinyl insert seems to work well in my experience. The foam style will find its position over time and not return to seal well. It also tears easily.

One spot a lot of people forget is the attic hatch door. Most have a foam tape around the edge. I have already replaced mine twice. You would be amazed how much heat loss goes up through a poorly sealed attic hatch. When you have that attic hatch open, check to see if you have any vents from the bathrooms that are exposed or lying on top of the insulation. If so, cover these or replace with flexible insulated duct. Your attic will get very cold and condensation in these pipes can freeze. I have seen more than one

bathroom vent that drips water during a mild spell. Give your insulation and roof decking a good look over for any signs of water leaks or damage.

Wait for a windy day and then take an incense stick and go around the windows and doors. You will be impressed at how this shows where the air leaks are. Make note and the next warm day slip outside and touch up the caulking in the areas that were noted. Older aluminum sliders are tough to winterize. The “one time” interior plastic storm windows that apply with double sided tape and then tightened with a hair dryer are inexpensive, but they really do work well.

Take that same incense stick and check your switches and plugs on the outside walls; you may be surprised how much air leakage there is. You can buy a foam insert that fits behind the cover plate that will reduce this air leakage considerably. Take a close look at your dryer vent and any exterior vent hoods for the bathrooms and kitchen. The flappers in these are known to stick; here a little silicone works well. I check my sump pumps at this time by running water into them. Make sure they work properly, that the discharges are clear and the check valves are operating. I have battery back-up units that I test now too. A quick thaw in February is not unusual and it is nice to know your sump is working properly. If you have a generator, it is a good idea to change the oil, clean or replace the spark plug, clean the filters and then run the unit for a period of time. There are some additives available for gas tanks when the gas sits for a period of time. I have always used this and our generator has never failed us. If your unit is a gas model, make sure you have a supply of fresh gasoline. If your gasoline is over three months old, dispose of it properly or save it for the chainsaw. My final couple of tips; make sure those outside taps are turned off inside, unless you have the frost-back style of taps and, lastly, buy a couple of bags of ice remover for your sidewalk. Why is it that the first ice storm seems to hit on a Saturday night!

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