

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR NOVEMBER 25, 2015
HEADLINE: THE 10 MOST COMMON MAINTENANCE MISTAKES.

Last week we listed some of the often missed home maintenance issues. This week, I will cover the “chronic” common maintenance issues that I see.

1. **FURNACE FILTERS:** In over half of the inspections we do, these filters are in need of changing. In a modern home, there is a long list of things that find their way to the furnace filter, i.e. accumulated dust, debris and animal hair. Dirty filters reduce the air flow and force the furnace to work harder to attain the temperature the thermostat is calling for. The longer the furnace has to work, the shorter its life expectancy. Higher fuel costs and possibly higher repair costs result in the short term. Replacement filters should be changed every 4-6 weeks in the heating season. Permanent ones should be vacuumed or washed out in a similar time frame and, if your home has an air conditioner, a couple of times during the summer, depending upon how much the A/C has operated.
2. **CAULKING IN TUB/SHOWER AREAS:** The caulking between the joints of the tile or a plastic liner and the edge of the tub is very important. In close to 2/3 of the homes we do, this area needs new caulking. If not kept up, over time, water will migrate behind the walls and cause mould, rot and, eventually, the wall will fail. A couple of hours removing the old caulking and \$20 worth of new caulking can stop a shower enclosure replacement job that can easily run \$1000 or more.
3. **DOOR AND WINDOW WEATHERSTRIPPING:** Improperly fitted or damaged weather-stripping is a condition I also see in half the homes we do that are over 20 years old. This translates into higher heating and cooling costs and longer running times for the furnace and air conditioner.
4. **MINOR PLUMBING LEAKS:** In nearly a quarter of the homes we inspect, we see leaking taps or drains. A minor water leak can add up over a year and, if you are on metered city water, this can translate into considerable dollars. Depending upon the length of time the issue has been ignored, leaks in drains can damage cabinets.
5. **BROKEN EXHAUST FANS:** I am always surprised at the number of bathroom fans that are disconnected, under powered or noisy. Some people do not like the noise and disconnect them. In rooms with high condensation, like bathrooms and laundry areas, this can greatly increase the chance of mould. Changing a fan is not a major job and if you don't like the noise, buy one with a low sound value. They are very quiet and a lot more energy efficient.
6. **IMPROPER GRADE AROUND THE HOME:** This is probably the largest single contributor of moisture invasion in basements, especially a block basement. The grade should slope away from the home at a minimum of 1/2" per foot to a maximum of ten feet or what the lot will allow. Some homes have a “swail” drainage ditch between homes, slope the grade towards this ditch. Natural settlement, climatic conditions and landscaping are the largest contributors to this condition.

7. **TREES AND SHRUBS GROWING TOO CLOSE TO THE FOUNDATION:**
The ivy growing up the side of the house, the shrubs that have grown over the past 20-30 years and that tree you did not want to cut down, can cause considerable damage over time. Ivy will advance the aging of bricks considerably, especially clay bricks. A few years ago we inspected a house built in the early 50's. I called a foundation contractor in, as the rear wall was suspect. A nice row of 20 foot plus high cedar trees lined the foundation and their roots had pushed the wall, causing the windows to shift. It had taken quite a few years, but the trees succeeded. It cost the homeowner nearly \$20,000 to repair the foundation. Over an extended period of time, all trees planted too close to a foundation will cause an issue.
8. **CLOGGED EAVESTROUGH:** Coupled with poor grading, over a long period, this can be very detrimental to the foundation. Overflow eliminates the effectiveness of eavestrough. In some installations, it can cause water/ice to backup on the roof, causing even more damage. It's getting cold, but it is better late than never to get them cleaned out to avoid problems this winter or spring.
9. **WORN OUT EXTERIOR CAULKING:** 10% of the homes we see have little or no caulking and in half the homes we see, the caulking is well past its lifespan. In these situations, water/ice/snow can intrude into the wall cavities. In the short term, it will discolour paint and cause blisters around the windows. In the longer term, I have seen extreme cases where the window sills, studs and framing are rotted out and have to be replaced.
10. **LACK OF ATTIC VENTILATION:** Additional insulation is a smart energy saving step. However, if you fill in the area where your roof and wall meets you no longer have the passive ventilation the attic needs. If you have an older home, quite often the design of the home does not allow soffit venting. This can cause moisture to build up in the attic and ice dam conditions can occur. As well, it can cause mould to grow and, in extreme cases, rot can happen. There are two vents on the market that will help; turbines or the "Max-vent" system. Ask your professional roofer for his suggestions. The good ones know the importance of proper venting. It will add some life to your shingles too.

I hope this list helps our readers to avoid these, all too frequent, problems. Remember an ounce of prevention really is a pound of cure.

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