

## ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR OCTOBER 19, 2016 HEADLINE: HOUSE CHECKUP FOR WINTER

Every year around this time, I get a number of e-mails from readers asking for suggestions for getting their home ready for winter. This year was no exception. I will share my own prep-for-winter list, which I update every year when we make a change in our home or upgrade any part of it.

The first thing I do is get out the ladder and check the roof. I give every flashing a good look over. Our home is a restored church with the original metal roof; I pay special attention to the seals and fasteners. This year, I had to patch a couple that had wind damage. I applied a thin coat of brushable roof coating over the flashings. We have no valley areas, but if you do, pay special attention to them. Our satellite dish is fixed to the fascia; I check the anchor bolts and then give them a thin coat of tar. The last thing I want to have happen is for the dish to come loose in January. We added the Spa addition, with a flat roof 2 years ago, and this year we spent extra time on the openings, plumbing stacks etc., making sure the sealants had not dried out.

Most homes have a roof that is shingled and, at minimum, a look at the roof from the edge is worth doing; binoculars can be another choice. If your shingles are over 10 years old and you are comfortable walking on your roof, it's probably a good idea to get up there. If not, call your roofer and have them give it a walk-over, just to be sure. Any areas of maintenance should be done then.

If you have eavestrough, clean them out just before the snow flies. I recommend you apply sealant on the inside of the joints and run a garden hose down each downspout to make sure they are clear of summer debris. If they are blocked, tie a collection of large bolts and nuts on a rope and remove the elbow at the ground, lower the bolts into the downspout and repeated up and down motions will remove most leaves, twigs and debris.

Now I walk around our B&B/Spa and give all the windows a good look over, with special attention to the caulking, though I replaced the majority of it a couple of years ago. Most caulking will last around 6-8 years, regardless of what the advertising says. Air leakage around windows makes homes uncomfortable, so use a good grade of caulking and get to it before it breaks down fully. A quick test is to take a slot screwdriver and stick it in your caulking. If it holds its shape and flexes with the tip of the driver it is likely good for a year or two yet. If it breaks away and has no elasticity to it, time to replace it. Don't forget the doors, around your dryer and any wall bathroom vents, as well as the HRV vents, if you have one installed. Take your screens down; ice accumulation is one of the largest reasons for damage to window screens.

Many homes I see have nice new windows on the main level, but they neglected the basement. In fact, when the stack ventilation effects of a home are considered, they should have been done first. If you have older windows that are not thermal insulated, the plastic windows that are applied with double-sided tape are a good one-time replacement. Make sure you seal them well and, once they are installed, do not over heat with the hair dryer. I often see where the tape has let go because they were over stretched.

While our driveway is gravel, many homes I see during inspections that are asphalt have a crack between the house and the driveway. This is a natural channel for fast water transmission off your driveway and down the foundation. Take the time to clear out the joint and seal with a good grade of driveway sealant/caulking. Next, I look over the grade around our house. Has anything settled over the year? We added some shrubs this year and the soil has settled. I will top it up and pay attention to the slope away from the house as I look around. A slope of about a ½” to a foot away from the home is acceptable.

Now is the time to get a jump on your woodstove/fireplace chimney cleaning. Call your WETT certified chimney sweep as soon as possible. By the late fall they may not be able to get to you before the snow flies. Use only a WETT technician, as this is a government-regulated program that trains and certifies this industry. A fully trained and experienced sweep should be able to spot visual conditions that could lead to expensive repairs and compromise your personal safety.

How are our entrance steps and walkways? Fix any concrete that is showing its age. Frost and the freeze-thaw cycle are tough on cement steps and walkways. You may have to break the old concrete away until you get to stable concrete and use some form of metal reinforcement to stabilize the integrity of the concrete. Check your foundation when you have the cement mixed up, if any cracks are noted, clean them out a minimum of 3/8” wide and fill them with an even coat. If you have smaller cracks, use one of the urethane sealants formulated for concrete and apply an even thin bead in the crack.

And finally, take the time to walk around your home twice; you would be surprised at what you missed the first time.

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