

Winterizing Your Home

A. Indoor Winterizing Tasks

1. Have chimneys cleaned and inspected. Blockages and buildup in chimneys can lead to dangerous conditions such as fires and inadequate ventilation.
2. Consider a thermal insulating blanket for your hot water heater. Hot water heaters are often the least-efficient appliance in your home. This is especially true if your tank is store in an outdoor storage room or garage . When temperatures drop the tank has to work extra hard to keep the contents warm.
3. If your windows are not made of newer insulated glass, consider installing storm windows. New, energy-efficient windows often two layers of glass with insulating air in between. Older, single-pane models allow cold air to more easily seep in and make rooms feel cooler.
4. Add insulation to attics and crawlspaces. Inadequate insulation in attics allows heat to rise up and out of your home, forcing heating systems to work harder to keep your home warm.
5. Install a programmable thermostat. Programmable thermostats allow you to automatically create a heating/cooling schedule for your home. At night you can allow inside temperatures to drop down a bit, but warm things up just before the alarm clock goes off. Similarly, you can allow the temperatures to drop inside your hours when it is empty during the day, but warm things up before you arrive home from work.
6. Arrange for a professional inspection of your furnace. Just like automobiles require periodic maintenance, furnaces require servicing by a professional. It's worth the cost of a service call.
7. If you vacation during the winter months, leave your heat on and set it to 55f or 13c degrees. This will help reduce the chance of interior pipes freezing.
8. Install a carbon monoxide detector. Gas-log fireplaces and furnaces can give off toxic carbon monoxide gases. Follow manufacturer recommendations on placement of monitoring device.
9. Install fresh batteries in all smoke alarms. We change the batteries in our smoke alarms twice a year, around daylight savings time changes. It's a good idea to periodically test alarms to be sure batteries are still working properly.
10. Inspect fire extinguishers and recharge if necessary. Replace any extinguishers older than ten years.
11. Insulate water pipes that may be exposed to freezing temperatures. If water in pipes freeze, chances are the expansion will cause them to burst and you'll be stuck with a huge bill from a plumber.

B. Outdoor Winterizing Tasks

1. Caulk around windows to prevent cold air from seeping in around cracks. If you are not sure your windows needed additional caulking, try the candle trick. On a windy day, light a candle and place it near your window with indoor cooling/heating systems turned off. If the flame flickers when a gust of wind picks up it is an indication air is seeping around your windows.

2. Clean gutters. A clogged gutter can lead to a flooded basement when snow melts and the water has no where to run off.
3. Drain garden hoses and turn off any outdoor water faucets. Remove nozzles or sprayers from the end of garden hoses and be sure to drain any water left in the line.
4. Add some antifreeze to the base of portable basketball goals filled with water. During winter months the water in the goal's base can freeze and expand, cracking the base. Purchase a brand of antifreeze that is safe for kids and animals just in case.
5. Inspect driveways and pathways. Patch cracks with a cement or asphalt kit to prevent water from entering the cracks, freezing, expanding and creating even larger cracks.
6. Make sure you have a snow shovel, rock salt, sand and other tools for dealing with snow and ice on your property.
7. Stock up on firewood. Store it at least 50 feet away from your home to prevent fire and termites from coming too close to your home.
8. Bleed the valves on any hot-water radiators. Open slightly until water appears and close again.
9. Be sure there are no flammable materials stored close to your furnace. This one seems obvious, but many fires are started during the winter months because of flammable items being stored too close to furnaces.
10. Inspect fireplace damper to make sure it is opening and closing properly. One year, in our old home, the damper wasn't opening properly, but we did not discover it until we lit a fire and the living room filled with smoke.
11. If you installed summer screens on doors and windows, replace them with the glass equivalents stored during the summer. Adding the extra pane of glass back to storm doors will add a layer of insulation against colder temperatures.
12. Drain gas from lawnmower and store for the winter. It's also a good idea to store the lawnmower or tractor indoors during extremely cold temperatures.
13. Consider a tune-up on snow blowers and other snow removal equipment. A little preventive maintenance goes a long way for winter equipment.
14. Apply sealant to decks. Sealant helps prevent wood damage from extreme freezing/thawing cycles.
15. Move potted plants inside, or closer to the home to prevent damage from freezing temperatures. The temperature near your home's exterior walls will be a little warmer than out further in your yard. It also helps to cover outdoor plants with a sheet to insulate them from sub-freezing temperatures.
16. Clean patio furniture and store it away from winter. In some areas winter storms are often accompanied by high winds. During these storms, outdoor furniture can be scattered about your yard (and your neighbor's yard). Since you won't likely be using it, look for a place to store it until spring.
17. Check with manufacturer to determine if spare refrigerators or freezers stored in unheated garages are safe to operate at extremely cold temperatures. Extra refrigerators and freezers are great for stockpiling grocery deals, but if the temperature drops below the inside setting of your refrigerator or freezer it can cause the unit to operate inefficiently.

18. Seal areas around dryer vents, cable outlets and mail chutes with a caulking gun. Look for cracks or holes around outdoor fixtures such as vents and outlets as these spaces allow cold air from outside to enter your wall space and make indoor heating less effective.