

Prepare for Winter with these helpful tips from the Do It Yourself Coach.
Tips for the home improvement, remodeling, renovation projects in your house.
Check off each step as you complete them.

The following are a list of things you should consider doing that are relatively inexpensive, but worth doing so that you can save time and aggravation during the Fall and Winter months. They could also save you a ton of money and put a smile on your face next spring.

We will start outside the home and work our way inside. If you are unsure of how to do any of the items mentioned it is strongly recommend that you hire a qualified professional to show you how for the first time.

In New Jersey where I live, I do the following by Thanksgiving or shortly after. I try to avoid having to face these chores in uncomfortable cold weather or under the pressure of oncoming storms and severe drops in temperature. If you live in a different climate, adjust accordingly.

Yard and Exterior

- Remove all leaves and yard debris, especially up against the house.
- Cover and secure outdoor furniture, barbeque grills, and play equipment.
- If you do not have frost proof hose bibs, turn off the inside valve and open the exterior bib to drain.
- Whether you have frost proof hose bibs or not, disconnect and drain all garden hoses. An un-drained hose connected to a frost proof hose bib can cause the unit to freeze and burst and require replacement. Un-drained garden hoses will split or weaken and result in a shorter life time or require replacement.
- If you have a lawn and garden sprinkler system, put a date on the calendar to blow out all the lines and winterize it. Make sure the backwater vacuum breaker is not holding water.
- Central Air Conditioning Compressors should be covered to prevent leaves and other debris from entering the grill. Either shut off the circuit breakers or use the exterior disconnect to make sure the unit is not accidentally started when the weather is too cold, which results in damaging the compressor. This is also a good time to make sure the unit is level so that water entering it drains out properly.
- Fact: Water from all sources is the number one cause of damage in residential homes. Please visit the article "Diagnosing The Cause of a Damp or Wet Basement" on this blog or at www.remodelingreports.com.
- If you have planting beds around your house, make sure that water will run away from the foundation.
- Are gutters and leaders sound and clear of debris? Are the leaders extended or exit on to a splash block that will lead melting snow, ice, and water away from the house?
- If you have a sump pump, does the water that exits from it run away from the foundation and has it been installed in such a way that the piping won't freeze?
- Do you have a back up pump on hand for a replacement in case the one you have fails?
- Are all windows and doors properly caulked and have been examined to make sure the calking isn't failing because of age?
- If you have any signs of leaking through the roof or siding, it should be fixed now.
- If you have attic access, it is a good time to look underneath the roof when it's raining to see if everything is sound.
- If you have exterior painted wood trim, doors, and windows, examine it to make sure that the paint is in good condition. If it is not, the wood underneath it will be subject to deterioration and rot and eventually require expensive replacement.
- If you have wood siding, examine it as above for the same reasons.
- If you have vinyl or aluminum siding, make sure it's attached to the exterior properly and that any of it that is loose is fixed quickly. In many cases, the fix is inexpensive compared to the cost if it blows off the house (totally detached). This holds true for any trim that has been clad.
- I look at the condition of my shed and decks and decide if It needs to be stained (or painted) before the winter or should I plan for it next spring.
- Replace any broken glass or insulated glass where the seals have failed.

Exterior deterioration from ignoring normal required maintenance can lead to high cost repairs and replacement from damage to other parts of the building. Not replacing the protective coatings over materials that have weathered will significantly shorten their life expectancy.

Basement and Equipment Checks

- ❑ Before you need your Hot Air Furnace for heat, make sure you change the air filter, vacuum any dust or soot around the burners, check that the smoke pipe to the chimney is pitched and secure. Then confirm that the blower, induction fan, and thermostat are working. Your unit is now ready for the cold weather. If you have a humidifier, make sure it is turned on and that the humidistat is set properly. Replace or clean the element of the humidifier according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Some units have a winter damper that must be opened in the heating season and closed in the cooling season. If you have an electronic air filter, follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning the filters and parts. Remember as mentioned previously to turn off the circuit breakers to the air conditioner. In some of the new high-efficiency units, where you have an interface control instead of a thermostat, check the manufacturer's manual which may recommend that you always leave the AC circuit breaker turned on.
- ❑ Make sure all drains and condensate lines work and are clear of any materials that could prevent draining.
- ❑ It is a good idea to have your systems inspected and serviced by a professional from time to time. When you have this done, you should watch and ask questions so that you have some understanding of what they look for, what they do, and how the system works.
- ❑ If you have a Hot Water Heating System, make sure there are no leaks. If the expansion tank is the type that requires yearly draining, drain it before starting the system. Make sure that the circulators are working and that the pressure gauge shows the correct operating temperature and pressure when it is firing up. Wait until the boiler has reached its set temperature and normal operating pressure and turn the thermostats up to open zone valves or operate circulator pumps. At this point you should recheck the pressure and temperature gauges to confirm the boiler is operating within recommended norms. This is also a good time to determine that the pressure and temperature relief valve is working correctly and is not allowing water to pass through it. A simple check is to manually open the relief valve by lifting the lever and release it back to its original position. Make sure you have a bucket under the overflow pipe. If the water stops running with no drips in a few minutes, it should be working properly. Finally, each system may require air in the lines to be bled for each zone. Make sure you have a knowledgeable person show you how this is done for your particular system.
- ❑ The next item to inspect should be your Hot Water Heater(s). Examine for leaks of any kind. Make sure there are no items near it that would block its ability to access the air it needs to burn. Remove all items of a flammable nature out of the vicinity of the heater. This applies to any gas or oil fired appliance. If you see dripping from the relief overflow pipe, the relief valve may be in need of replacement. Never cap the overflow pipe to resolve its dripping; it can lead to the tank exploding and harming the building and occupants severely. I will be covering Hot Water Heaters in more detail in a separate article to be posted on the blog shortly. It is also a good practice to hook up a hose to the drain at the bottom of the heater that goes into a five gallon bucket, open the valve fully and remove 4 to 8 gallons from the heater. This stirs up any mineral sediment and removes it, thus preventing a buildup. This buildup can do several things that include cutting down the recovery rate for hot water while making the heater less efficient and the mineral deposits can deteriorate the glass lining and lead to early failure. Even when the manufacture of newer units say that they are self cleaning, it is still a good idea to do this.
- ❑ The best time to make sure everything is in good working order is before you need it.
- ❑ If you have a sump pump, follow the previously mentioned that applies to it and ensure it runs the water into the sump pit to confirm that it is working properly.
- ❑ If you have any cracks in the foundation wall, now is the time to repair them before frost and ice and the cold open them up further.
- ❑ If your basement is damp or shows or smells from mold, read our blog article on "Diagnosing a Damp or Wet Basement". It can also be found on www.remodelingreports.com in an easy to copy or downloadable form.
- ❑ If you have some traces of mold, I will be posting in the next few weeks methods of cleaning it up yourself that won't cost you an arm or a leg, just a little elbow grease. If you can't wait, I suggest you read "The JLC Guide to Moisture Control". This is my bible on the subject with the exception of one additional method of remediation.

Interior - Safety First

- Make sure you have a minimum of a 5 lb., or better yet 10 lb., properly rated and inspected fire extinguisher on every floor. Fire extinguisher require maintenance, recharging, or replacement and will fail to work when you most need it if unchecked too long. Make sure you have an additional extinguisher in the kitchen near the stove and oven.
- Replace all back up batteries in smoke and carbon dioxide detectors at the same time each year. I choose to do this around Thanksgiving. (Hint: You can even write the date on the battery with a permanent marker as an extra reminder of when the batteries were last changed.)
- Have a family fire drill and designate a place to gather outside the house.
- If you have drinking water filters, have you been replacing the cartridges as required? When you do this, date the unit as a reminder.
- Water, Water Everywhere
- Wait for a heavy rain storm and go into the attic to make sure there are no leaks.
- During this storm, check windows and doors and note any signs of penetration or discoloration for future exterior inspection. If you can't solve the problem, do not let it go. Water can cause tremendous damage over a period of time and cause mold and health problems.
- Check all toilets, faucets, and tub or shower valves to make sure they are not running or dripping water. When they operate improperly, the loss of water can add up to hundreds of dollars.

I'm sure you have lots of things that you can add to these, so post your suggestions on the blog. We will all appreciate it. I know that when you look at this list it may be overwhelming. Just tackle each item one at a time and you may save yourself a lot of time, aggravation, and money.

**May the Coach be with you,
Coach Jerry**