

## FALL FIX UP ADVICE FOR YOUR HOME

By

Robert Mulloy.

Yes, let's face it, summer is over, fall is here and winter is just around the corner. Now you could procrastinate and exercise the "clicker" between football plays, but wouldn't it be great if you could just step back and with just one click, zap your home is ready for the winter? The reality of the situation is that most of us consider home maintenance to be a chore, an infringement on our free time. Well listen up, your house is calling you and shouting: "Hey, I'm hot, I'm cold and I'm wet all the time! How about giving your old friend a little attention?" A few preventative steps could ultimately save your home from deterioration. So hit the "off" button on that clicker and get to it!

Every home has several public enemies, **sunlight and moisture**. As each element strikes the home from the top and progresses downward, it takes a toll upon each part of the house. I suggest that you take a "birds eye view" of your home and consider its various maintenance needs in relation to the pathways of both sunlight and moisture. The following discussion is intended to help you to prepare your home for the onslaught of winter through an appreciation of each component's susceptibility and maintenance requirements.

**Chimney:** Does your chimney have a metal rain cap? If not, then the top of your chimney is nothing more than a hole in your house. Rain will enter causing brick and mortar joint deterioration and water may even show up as a new shower inside the fireplace. Without a rain cap, you may even experience uninvited new tenants moving in for the winter and blocking your flue. Look up at the chimney and check for erosion of the mortar joints or any flashings that are not lying flat, then do your chimney a favor and repair them before winter. Say, when was the last time you hired a member of the "chimney sweep guild" to clean the flues? Creosote is a fire hazard!

**Roof attachments:** As you are looking up, does your home still have an old television antennae attached to the chimney or roof when cable TV is now in use? That old antennae is most likely a rusting relic just waiting for the right gust of wind to blow it over onto the roof or through the skylight. Yes, you need to drag out the ladder and get up there. Any other attachments, such as: solar panels, satellite dishes, short wave antennas, cupolas, weathervanes, etc.; should all be examined for secure attachment and flashing integrity. Otherwise, wind and water may cause blow-off problems or flashing leaks.

**Roof openings:** Yes, when you think about it, there are other holes in your house that need inspection and maintenance. For example, every home has one or more plumbing vent pipes, and each vent pipe has a flashing boot that is not designed to last the life of the home. Sunlight causes the rubber gasket that seals the flashing to the vent pipe to deteriorate. You should examine each vent pipe & flashing for signs of decay and have them repaired before leakage occurs. If you are afraid of heights, simply examine everything from the ground with a pair of binoculars - just don't

annoy the neighbors (you know what I mean).

Your home may have other roof openings, such as: skylights, roof vents, attic fans, exhaust fan vents and roof hatches. Each opening needs secure attachment and watertight flashings. You should examine each roof opening and perform any needed maintenance repairs before winter or leakage may rain on your parade.

**Roof covering:** Take a moment and think back to the age of the kids or whatever association you use to remember dates and figure out the age of your roof! Most asphalt / fiberglass shingles have a service life of approximately 20 years. If your shingles have lasted longer than 20 years then you are fortunate to have had extended wear, but now may be the best time to "bite the bullet" and replace the old roof before winter. Telltale signs of an aged roof include: granules constantly found in the gutters, loss of pliability, cupping, curling, broken corners, missing shingle tabs, worn valleys and especially erosion between the vertical slots. If age or visible problems are noted, then you should ask 2-3 licensed and insured roofers to provide replacement estimates. Roof replacement should be a budgeted major expense, as a roof covering is not intended to last the life of the home. Once again, sunlight and moisture along with normal wear & tear will eventually cause every roof material to deteriorate over time. How long has it been?

**Gutters:** All sloped roofs should have functional gutters to control roof drainage. When gutters are missing, clogged or otherwise defective, then your home might as well be sitting under Niagara Falls without an umbrella. Water falling from the roof and constantly wetting siding & trim causes premature finish failure, mildew, mold and decay. Furthermore, uncontrolled roof drainage deteriorates entrance components, erodes foundation mortar joints, and causes soil erosion and wet basement problems. Before the leaves have fallen, you should drag out the ladder and climb up and examine the gutters. Clean them out, treat them with boiled linseed oil (if made of wood), then consider installing gutter screen guards to reduce clogging. Make sure the downspouts are securely fastened and that they each discharge water well away from the foundation.

**Siding & trim:** Regardless of what siding and trim are present on your home, they each have the same function: to provide a water-tight skin that sheds water and resists temperature differentials, not to mention cosmetic significance. Siding and trim with the greatest southern exposure will normally age at a faster rate and should therefore be examined first for fall fix up needs. All wood siding needs a coat of paint or stain to prevent premature aging caused by constant exposure to wet-dry cycles. A prudent exterior finish schedule should be budgeted every 5-7 years depending on the materials and exposure. So, when was the last time you painted or stained the house?

Take a walk around all four sides and examine all siding and trim components. If you see any vulnerable areas where water could enter behind the siding or trim, then get out the caulking gun or tools and do whatever needs to be done to shed water from the home. Take note of the clearance between the siding & trim and the soil or mulch. There should be a 4-6 inch clearance to prevent decay or pest infestation.

**Windows & doors:** We all have them and we all use them everyday, but we seldom give them

another thought. Constant exposure to sunlight & moisture requires that windows & doors receive a little "TLC" also, or deterioration, leakage and heat loss will result. Start outside and take a look at the trim above each window & door. You should see the edge of a cap flashing intended to shed water away from the window / siding intersection. Next, examine the caulking between the sides of the window trim & siding and also between the storm window and the primary window. Check the trim and windowsills for finish failure and signs of decay. Take note of any peeling putty, broken glass or storm window problems and fix each as needed before "old man winter" arrives.

Have you ever taken a moment to examine your basement windows? See and rust or decay? Are the window wells clean? Most metal clad basement windows only come with a factory primer coat of paint and you are required to apply a finish coat of rust inhibitor paint. If the old basement windows are wood, make sure they are not in ground contact and that there are no signs of decay or pest infestation.

In addition to being part of the watertight envelope, windows & doors should also provide light, ventilation and while preventing air leakage. If your windows are old, dried out, drafty and require numerous maintenance repairs; then perhaps you should seek several bids for new energy efficient insulated replacement windows.

**The bulkhead:** Homes in our part of the country have a basement entrance of some kind, and each seldom receives any inspection or maintenance. Your home may have a wood or metal bulkhead, an open areaway or a doghouse style entrance. Did you know that metal bulkheads rust from the inside outward because of condensation? Have you ever painted the inside of the door unit? Each type of entrance requires a brief examination to determine if water will be directed away or if maintenance repairs are needed. You should include caulking, painting, repair or replacement of the basement entrance on your fall fix up list.

**Steps & decks:** Sunlight & moisture also effect entrance steps and decks; each entrance should be examined for fall fix up needs. Take a moment to consider safety. Do you see any potential area where someone could slip, trip or fall and suffer a personal injury? Examine all handrails and guard rails for secure attachment. Check the brick steps for eroded mortar joints, broken nosings, tread defects and missing corner bricks and perform safety repairs as needed. Eroded mortar joints are especially vulnerable to water infiltration and frost damage, so repointing should be on your "to-do list". If the steps are made of wood, check for signs of decay.

Decks and wood staircases need specialized maintenance even if constructed of treated lumber. Treated lumber will suffer from sun damage & moisture absorption resulting in splintered surfaces, nail pops and even decay if not maintained with a wood preservative. You should apply a wood preservative to every deck component at 2-3 year intervals or you could be facing major replacement expenses far sooner than expected. Is your deck calling you?

**Driveway, walkways and patio:** Have you ever had your driveway seal coated? Have you ever applied a masonry sealant to your brick or concrete walkway? Are there visible cracks or other defects that could allow water to enter resulting in frost heave damage? Are there any tripping hazards? You park your car and you walk on them, but you should include your driveway,

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walkway and patio as part of your fall fix up routine. Each should be protected by the application of an asphalt sealant or masonry sealant every 2-3 years or sunlight and moisture will cause rapid deterioration.

**Shrubs:** If you did not prune your shrubs this past summer, then you should get it done this fall. There should be a walking clearance between the shrubs for the purposes of inspection, maintenance and for ventilation. If the shrubs are touching the home, then the siding and trim are vulnerable to decay and pest infestation as contact will cause moisture retention. For security purposes, the height of the shrubs should not be above your windowsills.

**Trees:** Now, if you were the "big bad wolf", which diseased tree or dead limb would you choose to blow down on the house or car? Don't forget to include the trees on your fall fix up list or you could be in for a rude awakening. Major trees should be at least 20 feet from the home and there should be no tree limbs above the roof or you could be facing potential storm hazards and property damage.

**Lawn:** It may be time to put the old lawnmower away for another season, but next spring is just around the corner and you want the grass to be greener on your side of the street. So, get out the old "gizzmo" and apply one last application of fertilizer before winter.

In closing, sunlight & moisture are public enemies number 1 & 2 in relation to your home and its maintenance needs. You should establish a fall fix-up routine that includes an inspection of each of the above listed items to determine which ones need your attention before winter sets in. Once completed, your house will thank you by stoutly resisting the elements for one more year. Then you can pick up the "clicker" and get back to the ball game with a clear conscience that a friend in need was not ignored.

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