



## 10 Tips to Get Your Home Winter Weather Ready

### 1) Clean the Gutters

- Once the leaves fall, remove them & other debris from your home's gutters – by hand or scraper & a good hose rinse—so that winters rain & melting snow can drain. Clogged drains can form ice dams, in which water backs up, freezes, & causes water to seep into the house. As you clean out your gutters, look for leaks & misaligned pipes. Make sure the downspouts are carrying water away from the house's foundation (at least 10ft away from the house), where it could cause flooding or other water damage.

### 2) Protect the Pipes

- Insulate all exposed outdoor & attic pipes with weather resistant material. Insulating foam tubing designed for pipes is easy to install & inexpensive. Make sure all surfaces of the pipe are covered
- If an extended & deep freeze is expected, insulation alone may not be sufficient. Consider installing electric heat tape or cable with a built-in thermostat. Be sure the heat tape bears an Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) seal & is in good condition. Do not overlap the tape when wrapping it around a pipe.
- Use insulating faucet covers, or wrap rags, paper, trash bags or plastic foam around outdoor faucets. Installing pressure-relief valves on outdoor faucets also helps prevent bursting of pipes that freeze.
- Temporarily cover any vents around your home's foundation
- Bring water hoses indoors
- Open the cabinets under the sinks in your kitchen & bathrooms to allow heated indoor air to circulate around water pipes.
- If you normally set back your thermostat at night or when away from home, change the setting to keep some heat on until the severe freeze is over.
- Insulate your outdoor water meter box & be sure its lid is on tight.
- Protect outdoor electrical pumps
- If you have a swimming pool, either drain the circulation system or keep the pump motor running. (Run the pump motor only in a short freeze. Running the motor for long periods could damage it)
- If your home has exposed pipes & a severe freeze is expected, let faucets run at a slow trickle, but don't run a big stream of water. Too many running faucets in an area can cause drops in community water pressure & problems for fire-fighting emergencies.
- If you plan to leave town, consider turning off your water at the shut-off valve while faucets are running to drain your pipes. (Make sure the faucets are turned off before you turn the shut-off valve back on)
- If you drain your pipes, contact your electric or gas utility for instructions on protecting your water heater.
- Be sure everyone in the household knows where the main water shut-off valve is & check it to make sure it isn't stuck. To winterize a house that will be vacant in frigid temperatures without heat, it is recommended to drain pipes. For hard freeze conditions many recommend adding nontoxic antifreeze (RV or boat anti freeze- NOT auto antifreeze) in the toilet bowls (about 1/3 gallon) & the p-traps of sinks & drains (about 2 cups)- or having a professional plumber drain & winterize the entire system.

### 3) **Block those Leaks**

- First, find the leaks: On a breezy day, walk around inside holding a lit incense stick to the most common drafty areas: recessed lighting, window & doorframes, electrical outlets. Then, buy door sweeps to close spaces under exterior doors, & caulk those drafty spots. Outlet gaskets can easily be installed in electrical outlets that share a home's outer walls, where cold air often enters. Outside, seal leaks with weather-resistant caulk. For brick areas, use masonry sealer, which will better stand up to freezing & thawing. Sealing small cracks will be beneficial.

### 4) **Insulate Yourself**

- Adding insulation to the existing insulation in the attic will definitely be worth it!
- Regardless of the climate conditions you live in, you need a minimum of 12 inches of insulation in the attic. To check if you have enough, go into the attic & if you can see the ceiling joists, you don't have enough. A ceiling joist is at most 10 or 11 inches.

### 5) **Check the Furnace**

- Change the furnace filters regularly (check them monthly). A dirty filter impedes airflow, reduces efficiency & could even cause a fire in an extreme case. It is also a good idea to have furnaces cleaned & tuned annually.

### 6) **Get your Ducts in a row**

- Ducts aren't always easy to see, but you can often find them exposed in the attic, basement & crawlspaces. Repair places where pipes are pinched, which impedes flow of heated air to the house, & fix gaps with a metal-backed tape. Ducts also should be vacuumed once every few years to clean out the abundant dust, animal hair, etc that can gather in them.

### 7) **Face your Windows**

- Take down the window screens & put up storm windows, which provide an extra layer of protection & warmth for the home.
- If you don't have storm windows, & windows are leaky or drafty, you should update them. This can be pricey. A temporary solution is to buy a window insulator kit. The kit is plastic sheeting that is affixed to a window's interior with double-stick tape. A hair dryer is then used to shrink-wrap the sheeting onto the window.

### 8) **Don't Forget the Chimney**

- A chimney should at least be inspected before use each year. You never know what might be lodged in there. Ask for a level 1 inspection, in which the professional examines the readily accessible portions of the chimney, most certified chimney sweeps include a Level 1 service with a sweep.
- Woodstoves should be swept more than once a year. A general rule of thumb is that a cleaning should be performed for every ¼ inch of creosote wherever it may be, because if it's ash, then it's primarily lye, a component that was one used to make soap & it is very acidic.
- Buy a protective cap for your chimney, with a screen. It keeps out foreign objects as well as rain that can mix with the ash & eat away at the fireplace's walls.
- Make sure your chimney's damper is closed when the fireplace isn't in use. This will keep the cold air out. Woodstove owners should have glass doors on their stoves & keep them closed when the stove isn't in use.

### 9) **Reverse that Fan**

- Reversing your ceiling fan is a trick that people don't often think of. By reversing its direction from the summer operation, the fan will push warm air downward & force it to recirculation, keeping you more comfortable. How do you know the fan is winter friendly? As you look up, make sure the blades turn clockwise.

### 10) **Check those Alarms**

- Check the operation & change the batteries on your home's smoke detectors. Detectors should be replaced every 10 years, according to fire officials. Test them—older ones in particular—with a small bit of actual smoke, & not just by pressing the "test" button. Check to see that your fire extinguisher is still where it should be, & still works. Also, invest in a carbon-monoxide detector; every home should have at least one.