

COLUMN FOR MARCH 20, 2004.
HEADLINE; TOP FIVE MAINTENANCE AREAS

Q; We recently bought our first new/older home and we want to keep it in good condition. My parents always talk about doing the small stuff before it becomes the big stuff. What are the major areas of maintenance that we should be aware of?

A: Your Parents are correct “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” and this is so true, especially with respect to a home.

Number One on my list is the simple furnace filter, if not changed on a regular basis this \$5.00 to 25.00 item can cause some considerable expense over the long term. If the filter accumulates the normal dust and air particles in an average home as it should and is not changed, your furnace has to work longer to pull the air through the duct system to arrive at the temperature your thermostat is calling for. This will shorten the life span of your furnace and in some cases with newer units will affect their operation. The one point many people forget is to change the filter in the summer if you have Air Conditioning. The same duct system that heats the home cools the home and it all passes thru the same filter. This can also cause air quality issues in the home. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the homes we inspect have filters that need replacement.

Number two on my list is the lack of window and door maintenance. Old or failed caulking, weather stripping that is missing, aged or damaged and poorly fitted openings lead to a multitude of issues. The most obvious is the loss of heat or air conditioning and cost of running these systems longer than needed. The hidden issue is the rain, snow and moisture laden air leaking around these openings. Homes over 15-20 years old with improperly installed or poor quality wooden windows are the largest offender. Recently I did a home where there was enough evidence on the wall below the front picture window that made me recommend this be investigated and when it was opened up the only thing holding the window was the nails on the sides of the window frame and portions of the drywall, the wood frame under the window was rotted out. This home was 14 years old! Caulking has a life span and it should be replaced before it is worn out. Do it properly, remove the old and clean out the opening. Find a good grade of caulking and apply a full even bead around all of the doors and windows. Follow the manufacturers directions for weather stripping and if you see stains under the windows, mainly at the corners, this is worth opening up for a better look. Nine out of Ten homes I see are lacking maintenance in this area.

Number three on my list is the bathroom, starting with the tub area. $\frac{2}{3}$ of the homes I see need work on the interior walls and around the floor of the tub. If you have tiles, take the handle of a good screwdriver and tap each tile. Start with one at the top so your ear gets the tone of a solid tile, hoping it is solid that is. Now start around the first row off the tub, that hollow tone is a dead give-a-way that wall behind is suspect for some deterioration. Check all of the grouting, regrout as needed and then after removing the old caulking at the seams use a good quality tub caulking, most are acrylic latex, and apply an even bead. Do not forget the edge of the tub at the floor and wall. I have seen more than one tub enclosure that has seen extensive water damage and the costs to repair this quickly climbs into the Thousand Dollar range and up for repairs. It makes that ten-dollar tube of caulking look pretty cheap!

Number four on my list is the lack of management of ground water and discharge around the home and this one can be the most expensive of them all. I have been present during numerous engineering assessments of failed basement walls and it is shocking the number that can be directly traced back to evetrough downspouts and negative grades to a home. While it may take a number of years, this can and does run into the thousands of dollars very quickly. Downspouts are commonly set at the corner of buildings and a constant flow of water during a good rain that can add up to hundreds of gallons of water that is now draining into the ground beside your foundation. Here a simple extension, I like to see a minimum of six feet, will usually do the trick. Negative grades in your landscaping around your home become a steady flow of moisture towards the

foundation and while it takes many years, it will eventually result in either dampness on the inside of the basement or foundation problems. Adding additional soil around the home will generally make a big difference. Compact the soil if you need more than a couple of inches to arrive at a gentle slope from the home. If you use continuous borders around your flowerbeds, make sure the inside of the flowerbeds are sloped away and maintain the soil at the same height of the borders. If not you are creating small ponds around your home. Get under that deck and aggressively slope it away from the home, this area is often forgotten. Three or four yards of topsoil are commonly all that is needed; average cost around a hundred dollars. Don't forget the downspout extensions, here about 10.00 to 20.00 is all this should cost.

Number five is the lack of proper ventilation in your attic. If the soffit areas are blocked or filled with insulation this can create moisture build-up, mildew and in the long-term decay in the wood structure. Ice dam conditions happen in older homes, excess heat build-up in the summer will add to the aging of your shingles, even with the extra insulation you may have added. The installation of a product called a baffle between the roof decking and the insulation makes a considerable difference. These are a very inexpensive item, they are made of Styrofoam and two or three packages that would do the average attic should cost in the area of \$ 20.00. If your home is older, install turbine vents in the roof, these also work very well if your soffit areas are blocked or too small to ventilate. I estimate over 75% of the homes we inspect lack proper attic ventilation. In theory, your attic should be the same temperature as the outside air, while few get this perfectly, the closer to this temperature the better. Last summer I was in the attic of a 25-year-old home and nearly 2/3 of the plywood decking was covered in mold, there was not a single roof vent installed in this attic.

And now the answer to last weeks "Trivia About Homes" The answer is A) Canadian Norman Breakey invented the Paint Roller in 1940. This weeks question is; Canadian William Lepage invented his now famous LePages White Glue. What was the main ingredient in the original version, was it A) codfish skins B) horse parts C) pit tails D) flour. The answer in next week's column.

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