

OK Valley Home Inspections *Where It's All About Knowledge*

Valley Voice

Vol III No. 6 A newsletter for **REALTORS, MORTGAGE LENDERS, HOMEOWNERS** (and other inspectors)

Fall is here and it's time to start thinking about putting your "home away for the winter". Here in the southern interior of BC, valley winters can be wet and harsh. In spring, inspectors often find that considerable damage has occurred as a result of improper or non-existent winter maintenance practices. Here are a few hints and tips for both homeowners and listing realtors to consider... could save you (or your clients) thousands of dollars.

CLEAN AND MAINTAIN GUTTERS DOWNSPOUTS AND DRAINS

The drainage system around a home includes roof drainage which gathers water, and distributes it to a controlled area. Before winter hits, make sure the gutters are attached properly, are free of leaves and debris and are tightly connected to downspouts. Find and patch leaking seams and connections. The water that escapes from the gutters and falls uncontrolled on the ground, will try to find its way into your home. Make sure that downspouts distribute water about two meters away from the foundation wall.

CHECK THE SLOPE OF PERIMETER DRAINAGE

The roof drainage system (gutters and downspouts) controls water from the roof. However, improper ground slope is often responsible with problems with melting snow, improper irrigation systems, run-off from driveways and poorly located downspouts. Grading may have been proper at one time, but added or modified sidewalks, landscaping, retaining walls and other man-made features, often interfere with the original drainage. Natural settlement under sidewalks or driveways also causes problems - this is caused by improper compaction.

FENCES, DECKS, RAILINGS AND OTHER WOOD MEMBERS

Check, clean, repair or paint all damaged wood surfaces. Ensure that debris such as dead leaves, tree needles or moss is removed from areas where it is in contact with corners, stairwells and cracks between deck boards. While you are scraping and painting, check soffits and other wood trim around the home as well. Tell-tale signs of excess moisture include blisters and cracks in painted surfaces.

FIX, CLEAN, SCRAPE AND PAINT WINDOWS AND DOORS

Most homes have some wood around doors and windows. Sun, rain, wind, hail and pets can damage the surface of sills, sashes, trim and frames, allowing more moisture into the cracks. You'll want to repair damaged wood before winter which includes scraping, sanding, painting and even replacing damaged putty. Examine weatherstripping at doors and windows and make sure they are airtight and close properly. Oil the locks and closing mechanisms.

GET YOUR ROOF IN ORDER

Summer is when we'll notice the problems caused during the winter - that is when most problems can happen. You'll want to check for missing or loose shingles, damaged flashing around vents as well as poor drainage or damaged caulking. Roof vents include air circulation vents and plumbing vents. Make sure they are not blocked with debris, bird nests, wasp nests, etc. While on the roof, look for cracks on concrete chimney caps, especially with masonry chimneys. Small cracks can soon become large cracks due to freeze-thaw cycles

over winter. If water gets into the bricks and mortar, deterioration will begin and could become an expensive

GUESS WHAT?

Of the ten most common problems found at a typical home inspection, almost HALF of them involve water. Others include electrical, structural, heating and general safety concerns. Lets solve some of those concerns!

repair. Remove any moss from between the bricks and anywhere else - including the shingles on the north slopes.

BATS AND BUGS IN THE ATTIC?

Attics should be checked on a regular basis. Look for signs of moisture and mould, insect nests and signs of animals. Bats can be dangerous and messy. Mice can do a lot of damage - they chew on wiring insulation, make noises in the middle of the night, and they are dirty. You'll probably have to check under the insulation to see proof of mice. Add some mouse poison in various places as mice will start entering the house when it starts getting cold. Attics should have an even coverage of dry insulation. Make sure all vent pipes passing thru the attic are properly attached to their respective roof vents. Check the chimney flue and other piping for leaks or damage. Now is a good time to add insulation to the hatch "cover" and install a band of weatherstripping around the opening to prevent air flow between the home and the attic.

CHECK THE CRAWLSPACE TWICE EVERY YEAR - FALL AND SPRING

Pop into the crawlspace and make sure that there is no unexplained moisture down there. Look at the wood structure and foundation for signs of failure or movement. In fall, ensure the electric heater works (if there is one) and "open" any heat vents on the metal plenums. If you have perimeter venting to the exterior, you'll have to close them or block them with insulation before winter. Check dryer vents which pass through the crawlspace and make sure they are clean and exit freely to the exterior of the home. A blocked dryer vent can add extra minutes onto drying time and in some cases, can become a fire hazard. If there is a crawlspace, there is a good chance that the main water service shut-off valve is in this area. Shut it off if the house is vacant during the heating season.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOUR FURNACE WAS CHECKED?

Some heating professionals suggest yearly maintenance - others will recommend every two years and some even less often. A professional heating service will usually

include a clean filter, flame analysis, checking timers and sensors, and a general cleaning of dust and debris from the burning chamber area. They'll check the fanbelt if there is one. Furnaces over 10 years old should always be checked before the heating season begins. Annually, clean humidifiers, check fireplaces, ensure floor vents are clean and airflow is not restricted. Clean baseboard heaters with a vacuum.

IS WATER SERVICE NEEDED OVER WINTER IN A VACANT HOUSE?

I inspected six properties this year that had major damage caused by water last winter due to frozen water pipes or tanks. Three of these vacant properties were listed for sale by their realtor, two were owned by "snowbirds" who were in Arizona for the winter and the last one was left vacant by an owner who was working in Germany for a few months. **In every case, the main water service could have been shut off.** All of these properties were vacated or listed in late summer or fall. When winter came, the furnaces were either shut off, had no gas service, or had not been switched over to the heating mode. As a result, three of the properties had frozen and ruptured toilet tanks, two had frozen service pipes that failed and the last one had a blown water heater. Actually, a seventh property was a manufactured home and the pipes under the unit froze. This house was also listed for sale and had to be taken off the market for a month until someone could fix the problems. Because the homes were vacant, the water problems were not discovered for several weeks - and in one case, for over two months (discovered by curious neighbour). Imagine the amount of water that was wasted and how much damage was done to that home! Damage in all cases was between \$10,000 and \$30,000. Most of these homes could **not** collect insurance.

If in doubt about leaving your home unattended, call a professional HomeWatch service for assistance. HomeWatch services will visit the home on a regular basis during extended absences - or while the home is listed and left vacant. Unless the water has been shut off, most insurance brokers insist that homes be visited every few days, especially during the heating season. HomeWatch services will also collect mail and newspapers, adjust curtains and lighting timers, check heating systems and report back to the client or agent when concerns are found. Some turn on furnaces and water just before a showing and close up afterwards. Call me if you need more information on HomeWatch services in my area.



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