

Start new year by tackling a home maintenance checklist

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Garden and lawn maintenance have gone into hibernation. Hopefully, so have holiday decorations.

Has the New Year's fresh-slate feeling heightened your desire to make improvements wherever possible?

Evaluate your home maintenance routine.

Flushing the water heater won't rivet you, but diligent home maintenance does make your home safer and save you money.

"Little things after a while get to be bigger things," said Mike Goewey, a certified real estate inspector, licensed builder and past president of the National Association of Home Inspectors, Michigan Chapter. "So it's a good idea to get together a check list."

In the case of your home's water heater, proper maintenance can cut energy bills. You're also less likely to find yourself taking an ice-cold shower come February only to face a hefty repair bill at month's end.

Proper maintenance extends the life of the heater, too, said Goewey, who is also president of Property Facts Home Inspections, a professional inspection services company in Livonia.

Trouble signs to look for when inspecting your water heater include corrosion around the plumbing, scorching in the burner compartment and poor venting. It's also a good idea to regularly flush the heater and regulate the temperature setting, Goewey said.

Water heater maintenance can be done in January; as can two other tasks that Goewey considers top priorities: replacement of batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and testing of both units. If you don't have a carbon monoxide detector, get one, Goewey said. And, make a point of sniffing around for gas leaks, too, he said.

Other spots in need of maintenance may have to wait until spring or summer. Nonetheless, it's a good idea to do a checklist in January, Goewey said. That way, homeowners make inspection of areas that are easy to overlook an annual routine. A checklist also enables homeowners to plan out repair and maintenance projects for the coming year.

In addition to poorly maintained water heaters and inoperative smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, there are eight problem areas that Goewey frequently sees when doing home inspections:

- Gutters - clogged or improperly aligned.
- Chimney flashing - in need of repair to prevent leaks.
- Chimney caps - cracked or deteriorated.
- Grading - ground sloping toward the house such that leakage may occur.
- Window and door caulking - lacking or insufficient which makes for higher energy bills
- Old or faulty electrical wiring - needs repair to

prevent shorts and even fires

- Use of plastic tubing with clothing dryer vents – replace with metal tubing to prevent dryer fires.

If you're not up to speed on home maintenance, consider calling a licensed inspector. Calling in a pro for these projects is not common practice among most homeowners, but on the rise, Goewey said. "More and more, people are doing it."

For some, they've grown older and need help inspecting and maintaining their home. Others, particularly single homeowners, lack the know-how.

"Many single people don't have the hands-on experience or they don't have the time. Whether it's a single woman homeowner or single male homeowner, it's an opportunity to get the knowledge and learn what you need to do."

When searching for an inspector, seek out a licensed professional and be sure to obtain as much information as possible, including years of work experience, a summary of services, and pricing breakdown. Typically, inspectors base their fees on a combination of factors: square footage of house, type of construction, and the age of the house.

"You should get a good idea about what the inspector is going to look for."

More information about home maintenance and hiring an inspector is available on the Internet from the National Association of Home Inspectors, Michigan Chapter at www.mi-nahi.com. The association's national website is www.nahi.org. To contact Property Facts Home Inspections call (800) 641-1111 or visit www.propertyfactsinspections.com.