

“Winterizing Your Home”

By Tim Oglesby Home Check America

Whether you are buying or selling a home, you should have a professional home inspection performed.

A home inspection will look at the systems that make up the building such as:

- Structural elements, foundation, framing etc
- Plumbing systems
- Roofing
- Electrical systems
- Cosmetic condition, paint, siding etc

If you are buying a home, you need to know exactly what you are getting. A home inspection, performed by a professional home inspector, will reveal any hidden problems with the home so that they may be addressed BEFORE the deal is closed. You should require an inspection at the time you make a formal offer. Make sure the contract has an inspection contingency. Then, hire your own inspector and pay close attention to the inspection report. If you aren't comfortable with what he finds, you should kill the deal.

Likewise, if you are selling a home, you want to know about such potential hidden problems before your house goes on the market. Almost all contracts include the condition that the contract is contingent upon completion of a satisfactory inspection. And most buyers are going to insist that the inspection be a professional home inspection, usually by an inspector they hire. If the buyer's inspector finds a problem, it can cause the buyer to get cold feet and the deal can often fall through. At best, surprise problems uncovered by the buyer's inspector will cause delays in closing, and usually you will have to pay for repairs at the last minute, or take a lower price on your home.

It's better to pay for your own inspection before putting your home on the market. Find out about any hidden problems and correct them in advance. Otherwise, you can count on the buyer's inspector finding them, at the worst possible time. Old Man Winter is settling in for a long chilly season. Before the temperatures dip too far south, follow these simple guidelines to winterize your home and save money on utilities.

Inside Your Home

- Have your furnace system serviced to ensure its working efficiently and not emitting carbon monoxide.
- Clean permanent furnace filters and replace paper or disposable filters.
- Replace the batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- If you have a wood stove or fireplace, have your chimney swept thoroughly. It

should be cleaned before the soot build up reaches one-fourth inch thickness inside the chimney flue.

- Check your hot water heater for leaks and maintain proper temperature setting (120 degrees recommended by Department of Energy). On older water heaters with less insulation, for every 10 degrees Fahrenheit you lower the temperature, you save 6 percent of your water heating energy.
- Check the attic to see if insulation needs to be added or replaced. This is the most significant area of heat loss in many homes, so it is also important to see that it has proper ventilation. Inadequate ventilation could lead to premature deterioration of the insulation materials. You may also need to check insulation in exterior walls, crawl spaces and along foundation walls.
- Check all windows and doors for air leaks. Install storm windows and putty, caulk or add weather stripping as needed.
- Check basement and cellars for seal cracks or leaks in walls and floor.
- Make sure all vents are clean and operating properly.
- Clean and vacuum baseboard heaters, heating ducts and vents.
- Remove or winterize air conditioning units.

Outside Your Home

- Store or cover outdoor furniture, toys and grill.
- Purchase rock salt for melting snow and a shovel or snow blower if you don't already have one. Make sure you have the right kind of gas and oil on hand for your snow blower in the case of an unexpected snowstorm.
- Caulk joints and minor cracks on exterior walls and siding.
- Look for deteriorating finishes. Minor problems can be patched to preserve the wood. Put bigger jobs, such as scraping and refinishing painted or stained areas, on the calendar for next spring or early summer.
- Drain and shut off sprinkler systems and other exterior water lines to avoid frozen and broken pipes. Leave all taps slightly open.
- Insulate exterior spigots and other pipes that are subject to freezing but can't be drained or shut off.
- Rake and compost leaves and garden debris, or put out for yard-waste pickup.
- Clean storm drains, gutters and other drain pipes.
- Check the foundation for proper drainage. To do this, spray yard with a hose to see if water runs away from the house. A little shoveling to reshape the earth next to the house may make the water run away from the foundation.
- Make sure dirt or piles of wood don't come into contact with or touch siding, inviting termites and carpenter ants into the house.

- Seal driveway and walkway cracks, if needed, before ground freezes regularly.
- Inspect the roof for loose, damaged or missing pieces.
- Check attic vent openings for nests or other blockages.

About the Author

In 1984 Tim Oglesby unknowingly bought a home with significant defects. In 1994 he began Home Check America to assist new homeowners in NE Illinois. With degrees in business and management, trained as a home inspector with Carson & Dunlop Engineering, general contractor for ten years, a licensed home inspector and real estate broker; he is a sought after public speaker and author on issues important to property management and homeownership. www.homecheckamerica.com or call toll free **1-866-245-4663**