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Dave Windsor's 'Alaska Real Estate'

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Preparing Your Home For Winter

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So you've noticed the mornings are darker, it's harder to arouse yourself for the day, and there's a crispy feeling in the air. Winter's at the door. Well, at least you've raked your leaves and you've got your studded tires on the car, but here are a few other winter preparation ideas that may make good sense for your home.

Clear the yard, and especially sidewalks, of ornaments and plants that may impede walkways and snow shoveling in winter.

Test-drive the snow-blower. You may well have started it several times last year but that does not mean it will start this year so check out the adjustments, top up or completely refresh the oil, and start the engine before first snow.

Clear extra vehicles from the roadside. Many families have excess trailers, cars and other vehicles these days. Park unnecessary vehicles off the road for the winter. You, and your neighbors, will really appreciate the snowplow having clear access to clean up your street after snow.

Outside faucets should be protected from freeze-up. Never leave hoses connected in winter as this can drive ice back into the faucet, even the water pipes, and create havoc one cold January morning. Styrofoam covers are also cheap and a great idea to protect those exterior faucets.

Have your heating system serviced.

Your furnace, or boiler, will start to work harder in October and stress puts maximum pressure on the system. Hire a licensed contractor to check it out thoroughly. Even if you have a sound forced air system, now is the time for new filters at a minimum.

Check your roof. In the fall, wind and rain predominate. Wind can blow off flashing or shingles and leave openings for water to penetrate. This is much more difficult to fix, if discovered after snow cover, or during spring thaw. Also, clean out your gutters.

Tidy up your garage for winter use. Make sure there is an adequate drain field for melting snow - this is the biggest issue. Why not move out summer toys and projects so that you can enjoy driving right into heated space in the winter?

If you do park outside through the winter months, think about an engine block heater for subzero mornings. The second most critical item for exterior car storage is a good battery. If you have a strong battery you will rarely need the use of an engine block heater.

Programmable Thermostats inside the home are an inexpensive and helpful addition to any property. Programming daytime, night and weekend temperatures saves a heck of a lot of messing with the thermostats, and saves money too! If you already have some, change the batteries. A failing thermostat will simply just turn off the heat and you may not be home .

Install Carbon Monoxide Detectors. There are many brands and versions available, but a quality unit can be obtained for around \$50 or less. The Code for existing homes requires a CO detector on each level of the home, preferably in a hallway outside any bedrooms. The CO detector should be a plug-in unit with battery backup.

Crawl Space Vents may be shut off with insulation or even closed for the winter. This reduces the risk of frozen pipes, but be sure to open the vents next Spring.

Finally, happy winter to all of you. Be sure to remember your electric blanket - or at least make sure you have someone cozy to cuddle up with at night.

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