

Preparing Your Home For Winter **October 20, 2013**

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 in winter. Have you ever started snow shoveling in winter, only to discover some garden ornament frozen firmly in the path? Clean up now – the yard won't be visible for the next 6 months!

Test-drive the snow-blower. You may well have started it several times last year, but that doesn't 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. There's nothing quite so frustrating as waking up to 12 inches of snow in the driveway with your snow-blower non-functional.

Clear extra vehicles from 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.

Also, plan your snow storage. The Municipality has become increasingly aggressive in handing out significant fines to people who push snow into the Right-of-Way.

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 through the cold season.

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. \$120 now is nothing compared to the grief that can arise when your heat goes out on a Sunday morning in December. 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 late fall so that spring doesn't find gutters and downspouts inoperative.

Stack firewood conveniently for your cozy winter fires. It makes good sense to have dry wood readily available near the house, as opposed to a hundred feet down the backyard, in winter.

Consider a gas conversion for your fireplace. There are 2 kinds – a complete gas fireplace vented to the exterior, or a gas insert. The new gas fireplace is an extensive and expensive operation, though a nice addition when complete.

However, a gas insert can provide an inexpensive alternative. A nice unit, with attractive presence, costs around \$1600. You have to add to this the cost of bringing the gas line to the unit and installation. These cost approximately \$200 and \$400 respectively.

For a total of less than \$2500 you can install an insert that, with a flick of a switch, cozies up your home instantly. You'll never have to clean up the fireplace ashes again. Units also have a fan which increases the considerable amount of radiant heat emitted. You'll wonder why you ever waited so long to make this decision!

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 a 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!

Install Carbon Monoxide Detectors. There are many brands and versions available, but a quality unit can be obtained for around \$50 or less. 'CO' is a colorless, odorless and deadly gas created wherever combustion is taking place. From kitchen (gas range) to utility room (furnace), to garage (motor vehicles) carbon monoxide is produced.

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 at least closed for the winter. This reduces the risk of frozen pipes. If you have a dry environment there is a strong argument that ventilation of a crawl space has more negatives than positives year round but, with the amount of wet ground in Anchorage, lean on the side of caution, so 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.