

# Your Home for the Holidays



## Maintenance Is Critical This Time of Year

by *Broderick Perkins*

Things get crazy around the holidays.

All the shopping, decking the halls and visions of sugar plums can cause homeowners to lose focus and overlook issues that can turn a season of joy into a season of “oops.”

American Society of Homeowners President Frank Lesh says it doesn't have to be that way. He offers a Top 10 list to remind busy homeowners that just a few minutes a day can keep the ghost of deferred maintenance away.

“Homes are the centers of activity during the holidays,” Lesh says. “You can't take them for granted or take unnecessary risks – even if you want your house to be the brightest, most festive on the street. By following these simple tips, you can help protect your home against the rigors of winter and the pitfalls of the season.”

1. Clean your gutters and downspouts. They play an important role in diverting water away from foundation walls. That means less damage related to water and moisture. If you clean them before winter weather moves in, you can keep your basement and crawl spaces dry and leak-free.
2. Drain exterior water lines. Frozen pipes that can crack the lines are history if you remove, drain and store outdoor hoses now.
3. Give your garbage disposal a hot water bath. Cooking for crowds puts additional stress on these appliances. Flushing the garbage disposal with one pot of hot water and a half-cup of baking soda now – and again after the holidays – can help prevent plumbing problems and costly repairs. Grinding citrus fruits with a dish soap solution can remove the smell of decay.
4. Have your home heating systems inspected. Nearly half (44 percent) of all home heating fires occur in December. Schedule a professional inspection of your home's heating systems, including furnaces, boilers, fireplaces and water heaters, every year before winter weather sets in. Stock up on furnace filters and change them regularly.
5. Re-caulk and weather-strip doors and windows. Save energy and money by sealing air leaks around doors, windows, corner boards and joints. Make it a habit.
6. Trim back tree limbs. Overhanging tree limbs are both a falling hazard and a chimney or flue blockage hazard. Also consider installing a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector. Replace batteries when Daylight Saving Time begins and when it ends.
7. Keep a fire extinguisher handy. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the nation. Buy and place a fire extinguisher away from potential fire sources so that you can reach it in an emergency. Make sure it's charged and ready to go.

8. Test your electrical circuit shut-off switch. Plug outdoor decorations only into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Ensure that the circuit shuts off properly by using a night-light or radio. Click the circuit button. If it clicks and the night-light or radio stays on, the circuit has not shut off. Consider contacting an electrician to check for problems.
9. Be steady on the ladder. Falls account for an average of 5.1 million injuries and nearly 6,000 deaths a year. Before hanging Christmas lights, wrap pipe insulation around your ladder beams (vertical members that the rungs are attached to). The insulation helps prevent the ladder from slipping and provides insulation against electrical shock.
10. Avoid using extension cords except when absolutely necessary. If you do, be sure they are the proper gauge. And don't run them across hallways or doorways, under carpeting or furniture or through walls. Never, ever staple them in place.



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