

10. Tips on Home Repair & Maintenance



Once you've finally settled in, you may start to view your home with a more objective eye. Perhaps there are things you'd like to change — the kitchen cabinets or the flooring, for instance. Perhaps there are things that require repair, such as the plumbing or the windows. You will soon realize that maintenance, repair and renovations are a normal part of homeownership.

Perform Regular Maintenance and Repair

By doing regular maintenance and taking care of small repairs right away, you'll avoid more costly repairs down the road.

One of the best things you can do is get to know your new home. Here are some things you need to know:

- Your home is made up of various components that work together. These include mechanical systems (heating, air conditioning and ventilation) and the building envelope (foundations, floors, walls, windows, doors and roof).
- You need to learn enough about the major mechanical systems of your home to be able to perform routine maintenance and handle various emergencies. Every adult member of your household should know the location of the following:
 - Main shutoff valves for water and fuel
 - Emergency switch for the furnace or burner
 - Hot water heater thermostat
 - Main electrical switch
 - Fuse box or circuit breaker box
- Renovations targeted at increasing energy-efficiency may affect appliances exhausting by a chimney. Check chimney performance if you tighten the envelope or add exhaust fans.
- Moisture, heat and air pressure must be balanced to ensure a healthy home

Remember that homes, like people, get old. It's a good idea to inspect your home regularly and replace or repair parts and materials that wear out with use and time. And remember that since different components of your home work together and affect each other, minor repairs can quickly become major ones if they are not immediately taken care of.

You will probably be able to do many of the repairs yourself. However, if you feel you cannot handle the job on your own, it is best to call an expert. No matter whom carries out the repair, remember that the work has to be well done. Bad materials and poor workmanship will end up costing you more in the end. Don't forget to keep records of any repairs and improvements you make.

Home Improvements

Besides doing regular maintenance and repairing your home, you will also want to consider renovating or making improvements. These changes will not only make the home more pleasant for you to live in, they may also increase its value.

Change is good but be careful not to go overboard unless you plan to stay in your home for many years. If you are planning to sell your house, you also have to ensure that the changes don't make your home worth a lot more than the other homes around you. Remember that the value of your home is closely related to the other homes in your area.

Here are some things to keep in mind when planning a change or renovation:

- Think about how changes would appeal to someone buying your home in the future. You can make very personalized changes with paint because it is inexpensive and can easily be changed. However, things like flooring, cabinets and countertops have a longer life — make choices that will also be appealing to others.
- Updating the bathrooms and kitchens in an older home can increase its resale value.
- Don't underestimate the importance of landscaping. The right planting can improve the appearance and value of your home.
- Updating your exterior paint, installing new roofing, resurfacing your walkways and driveway, adding attractive mailboxes and front-yard planting will also help make your home more appealing.
- Over time, some renovations can practically pay for themselves, especially if they result in savings on utility bills, a higher selling price or years of greater comfort and enjoyment in your home!

Make Sure Your Home is Fully Secure

- Change all the locks when you buy a new home.
- Add dead-bolt locks and window locks where necessary.
- Consider getting a security system. Your property insurance rate may be lower if you have one.
- Use outdoor lighting. You can get lights that turn on automatically every evening or motion-sensor lights that come on when someone walks by. However, use outdoor lighting judiciously to be more energy-efficient.
- When you are away from home, use lights and radios on automatic timers and arrange to have your mail and newspapers picked up or discontinued. This way, people won't be able to tell that you are not home.
- Get to know your neighbours and keep an eye out for each other.

Be Prepared and Stay Safe

Have a fire evacuation plan and make sure everyone in your home knows how to get out of the home from each room in case of a fire. If you have a second floor, you need a special escape plan to get to the ground. Check to see that windows have not been painted shut. Although doors and windows should always be securely locked, you have to be able to open them in an emergency.

A few tips:

Fire extinguishers must be easily accessible at all times. If you have a two-storey home, there should be one on each floor. Remember to check your fire extinguishers at least once a year. To help you remember, make a habit of doing it when you set your clocks to Daylight Saving Time.

In some areas, it is a legal requirement to have smoke detectors in your home. Even if they are not, you will still want them in your home. Check the batteries at least once a year. Carbon monoxide detectors are also important to have. They will let you know if there are high levels of carbon monoxide in your home, and can save you from illness or death. To make sure that they are working properly, check them

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at least once a year. It is a good idea to make a habit of checking your fire extinguishers, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors at the same time.

Paper, paint, chemicals and other clutter can be a fire hazard. Make sure they are stored in a safe place. If you no longer need them, hazardous materials must be disposed of at a community toxic waste center. Never put them in the garbage.

Collect your important papers and store them in a safe place — for example, a fireproof box or a safe deposit box.

Keep a list of emergency phone numbers (including 911, poison prevention line, doctors, relatives, neighbours and friends) close to the phone and make sure your children are aware of it.