



Mike Veitenhans
206.930.8374

www.mvhomeinspection.com
mike.v@mvhomeinspection.com
6707 Palatine Ave N
Seattle WA 98103

Home Inspector License 225
SPE License 70124

Basic Home Maintenance Tips

Purposefully walk around and carefully inspect your property at least twice a year (when daylight saving time begins and ends are two easily remembered times) and after any major storm or potentially damaging event, and perform these maintenance tasks as they apply.

Grounds

- Prune tree limbs and plant foliage so they're at least 12 inches away from the roof, siding and trim.
- Grade soil, bark and gravel so they're at least four to six inches below siding and trim, and sloped to drain away from the foundation.
- Caulk small "common" cracks in concrete when they get big enough to prevent the water, soil and vegetative intrusion which speeds deterioration of the concrete.
- Apply sealer topcoat to asphalt every three to five years to keep it resistant to the moisture intrusion that causes it to deteriorate.

Basic Structure and Ventilation

- Look in the attic, basement and crawl space for signs of moisture intrusion, wood destroying organisms (rot, carpenter ants, termites, etc.), rodents or anything else that shouldn't be present. Moisture in the attic? Check for roof leaks. Moisture in the basement or crawl space? Check for plumbing leaks, improper grade, disconnected downspouts or clogged drains on the exterior. Rodent droppings? Check for damaged ventilation screens or gaps through the siding and trim.
- Always run exhaust fans (or open windows if you don't have exhaust fans) when washing clothes, bathing and cooking to vent excessive moisture from interior.
- Program the timer to run the whole house ventilation fan a minimum of eight hours per day to maintain good indoor air quality, especially during cold weather when windows are closed.

Roof

- Remove debris from the roof surface.
- Clean gutters, downspouts and drains to keep them working properly.
- Clean and treat cedar shake roofs with a stain/preservative every three to five years.

Exterior

- Caulk gaps in seams around windows and doors and around penetrations through the siding.
- Repair/replace damaged ventilation screens to prevent unwanted critters in the attic and crawl space.
- Repair broken siding and trim; prime and paint/stain any bare untreated wood. (Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based exterior and interior paint; dry scraping and sanding can release the lead into the air and soil, creating health hazards, especially for small children. For more information regarding lead, go to www.epa.gov/lead/.)
- Clean and treat wood decks with a stain/preservative every two to three years.



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Garage

- Adjust the spring hinges on the door between the garage and living space when they fail to automatically close the door all the way.
- Check the safety sensors and close force controls on the garage door opener and detach the door from the opener to check spring tension. Safety sensors are adjusted properly if they reverse/open a closing door when the beam between the sensors is interrupted, the close force control is adjusted properly if the opener reverses/opens a closing door when resistance is applied to the bottom of the door and spring tension is adjusted properly if the door is detached from opener and stays open in the half-closed position. Don't try to adjust a roller type spring yourself – call a professional.

Electrical

- Operate test buttons at least once a month to ensure all arc fault circuit interrupter (AFCI) breakers and ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets function properly; replace defective breakers and outlets as needed.
- Operate smoke and carbon monoxide alarm test buttons at least once a month (once a week is better) to ensure the alarms function properly; replace all alarm batteries when any alarm begins to “chirp,” signaling a low battery.

Plumbing

- Operate the main water shut-off valve and temperature pressure relief (TPR) valve on the water heater at least once a year to “exercise” them and keep them functioning properly.
- During freezing weather, remove hoses from frost-free hose bibs (hoses filled with water defeat the frost-free mechanism) and cover/insulate non-frost-free hose bibs or shut them off if they have interior shut-off valves.

Heating

- Have natural gas and oil furnaces inspected and serviced every year.
- Inspect furnace filters at least once a month during the heating season and clean or replace as needed.
- Regularly vacuum the grills of electric wall heaters to remove dust.
- Inspect and clean regularly used wood-burning fireplace chimneys at least once a year.
- Turn off gas to fireplaces with pilot lights during the summer to save on utility bills; follow the manufacturer's instructions when you relight the pilot lights.
- Clean fogged fireplace glass before the fog etches the glass per the manufacturer's cleaning instructions.

Interior

- Check/recharge fire extinguishers every year.

Some Very Useful Web Sites

- InspectAPedia – <http://inspectapedia.com>
- Old House Web – www.oldhouseweb.com
- United States Environmental Protection Agency – www.epa.gov
- United States Consumer Product Safety Commission – www.cpsc.gov