



August is a transitional month. Summer is winding down, and preparations have begun for the school year. Now is a great time to examine your home and take steps to get ready for colder weather.

Outside

Check the exterior of your home for problems that should be repaired before winter. Make sure the outside walls of your home are free of debris. Lumber, ladders, or toys stacked against the house can attract spiders, mice, and insects. As colder weather arrives, these pests have incentive to enter the warmth of your house.

If you stock firewood for the winter, don't stack it against the house. Besides attracting wood-boring insects and other pests, it can prevent air circulation and trap moisture against the house. This can rot siding or trim. Store firewood 2 feet from the house and elevate it 18 inches above the ground.

Inside

Check your hot water heater and the surrounding areas for leaks, rust, or corrosion. Check lines and connections. Look underneath the tank with a flashlight. If you see water or signs of moisture, replace the tank.

Hot water tanks have a safety feature called a pressure release valve. If the pressure in the tank gets too great, this valve allows hot water to escape to keep the tank from exploding. Test this valve yearly for proper function. (Do this test during regular business hours in case you need help.) The valve has a small handle and is located on the top of the tank. A section of pipe is attached to allow the water to drain onto the floor. Put a bucket under the pipe before you test the valve. Carefully, because the water will be hot, pull the handle to open the valve for 5 seconds, then close the valve. A small amount of water should drain into the bucket. If the valve doesn't close or if no water drains out, the valve may not be working. Call a plumber immediately.

Cover your water heater with a fiberglass insulation blanket to retain heat, particularly if you have an older water heater that has less-efficient built-in insulation. Do not cover heater controls.

Have your furnace systems inspected and serviced before winter. Use a qualified HVAC contractor.

Check sinks for slow drains. Each household sink is equipped with a J-trap—the pipe section underneath the sink with a J-shaped bend. This trap seals the drain with water to keep sewer gas from entering your home. The J-trap is a common place for clogs. To clean the drain, mix equal parts salt, baking soda, and vinegar. Add the mix to the drain, and then add two quarts of boiling water. You can also physically disconnect the J-trap and clean it with a garden hose or

coat hanger. There will be water and other material in the trap, so wear protective gloves and be ready to catch the spill.