

# **THIS OLD HOUSE**

## **FALL INSPECTION CHECKLIST**

### **EXTERIOR**

- Check for cracks in asphalt or concrete on driveway, sidewalks, and paths. These can be a tripping hazard, and can invite water that will do more damage during the colder months.
- Make sure retaining walls have no bulges or loose areas. One heavy rain or snowfall, and you could have a mud slide on your hands. Make sure the weep holes built into the wall are clear.
- Examine porches and decks for sagging ceilings, loose rails or boards, and damaged steps. Check to make sure the posts are still firmly in the ground and not loose, or worse yet, rotted completely out of the footing.
- Give fences and stone walls-and their gates-a once-over for leaning and loose parts, which could fall or blow off during a storm.
- Look for stains on the siding, which could be a sign of a water problem or a roof issue
- Look for signs of insect or bird nests in soffits, eaves, or attic vents. If you see signs of animal waste in a certain area, look around for the possible nest or culprit.
- Take note of where paint is peeling, brick mortar is missing, or stucco is cracking on the house's siding.
- Look for leaning on the chimney. Check that the flashing is in good condition, and not peeling up or missing.
- Check gutters and downspouts for debris or improper pitch, especially during a rain storm. Look for stains on the soffit, which could be a sign of a leak.
- Examine the foundation for cracks and bulges.
- Take a look at the sill, checking for rot and insects. Look for raised mud channels, which indicates the presence of termites. Use a sharp knife or other probe to see how much the wood gives.
- Make sure the grade of the ground around the foundation slopes away from the house.
- Look at the roofing. Are there cracks, missing shingles, crumbling pieces? Check asphalt for dry, blistering, alligatoring, or curling shingles; wood for rot and splits; slate and tile for broken pieces; and flat roofs for holes. Be especially vigilant under trees, where falling branches or jumping animals could have done damage. Once the leaves have fallen, look more closely at where branches touch the house.
- Examine the flashing and vent/chimney caps for missing or damaged parts. Look for rust.
- Look for moss and other debris on the roof.

### **PLUMBING, including BATHROOMS and LAUNDRY**

- Look for signs of leaks in all exposed pipes, and in areas where pipes run through the walls or foundation.
- Look for signs of corrosion, which could indicate a problem with the water, or with the pipe itself. Watch for green stains around brass and copper fittings and on shutoff valves, a sign of either corrosion or electrolysis caused by mismatched metals. This will cause leaks and bad connections if left uncorrected.
- Check the water pressure. Low pressure could mean a problem with the line or just sediment buildup in the faucet aerator or shower head.
- Check drains for speed of drainage - a slow drain may have a clog or a blocked vent pipe. Look for a full swirling drain; bubbling drains are a sign of a problem.

- Flush the toilets to make sure they operate properly. Open their tanks and look for worn or missing parts. Then wait around for a few minutes to see if the toilet runs after a pause, a sign of a slow leak.
- Look inside the burner chamber of the water heater for rust flakes. Check the flame; it should be an even blue, with no yellow. A yellow flame indicates soot or a problem with the gas-air mixture, meaning the jets need cleaning.
- Drain the water heater to remove sediment that has settled to the bottom. Sometimes leaks in faucets are caused by hard water wearing out the washers.
- Watch out for cracked tiles in the shower area or around sinks. Tap on tiles looking for loose or hollow ones, which could be masking rotted backerboard behind them.
- Check on the state of the tub and shower caulking to see if its time to replace it.
- Look for evidence of mildew where water has a chance to stand for longer periods
- Manipulate the toilet base to be sure it doesn't rock, which might mean a leak has damaged the floor around it.
- Look for cracks on the toilet tank or bowl or on sinks
- Slide shower doors do check for sticking, rust, or obstructions. Examine the gaskets around the door glass for gaps and tears.
- Turn on the shower and bath faucets and check for leaks around handles and valves. Are they easy to use, or harder to turn on and off? Check set screws around escutcheon plates.
- Unscrew the shower head and look for collected sediment in it that could be lowering the water pressure.
- Examine vent fans for obstructions or dust. Turn them on: If it sounds really loud, the bearings may be worn out or a flapper may have gotten stuck.
- Check washer hoses for signs of aging (cracks or brittleness) or leaks.
- Check dryer vents for tears. Vacuum or brush out lint in hose and around lint screen inside unit. Look for link around the floor or on the wall, indicating a clog in the vent hose.

## **WATER and SEPTIC**

- Send out a sample of well water to your county cooperative extension to test it for chemicals and bacteria.
- Make sure that the well cover is tightly sealed but there is still access to the pump.
- Check the sump pump by pouring water on it, to see if it turns on automatically.
- Look around your septic tank/field for soggy ground or overly lush vegetation, which could mean the tank is full or failing.

## **HEATING**

- Take a flashlight into the furnace flue and look for a buildup of soot or rust. Tap on it to see what falls; rust is a sign of condensation, which is caused by an inefficient furnace. Have a pro service the system regardless of what you find.
- Make a solution of dishwashing soap and water, then brush it on ductwork joints-wherever there are leaks you'll see bubbles in the soap.
- Check registers and vents for loose or missing covers and screws.
- Check around radiators for leaks, or damaged floors, which could be a sign of a leak or an incorrect pitch toward the return.
- Look for overall deterioration, rust, loose parts, and other signs of a failing system.

## **ELECTRICAL**

- Check trees around the house to be sure they're not threatening wires.
- Open the panel and look for new scorch marks around breakers or fuses. Also check outlets for scorch marks, which could be a sign of loose and sparking wires.
- Look for loose outlet covers, receptacles, and loose boxes, which may have to be refastened to the studs while the power is turned off.
- Test all GFCI outlets by plugging in a lamp and then hitting the test and reset buttons to see if it turns the light off and then on again.
- Go around with a electrical tester (or lamp) to make sure all outlets work

## **INTERIOR**

- Now that summer's humidity is gone, check doors for swollen spots and sticking.
- Look for loose hinges and doorknobs.
- Check the floor for popped nails, loose boards, loose tiles, and springy spots that could be a sign of joist trouble.
- Look at ceilings for stains, which could indicate a roof or plumbing leak.
- Make sure ceilings and floors aren't sagging or cracked in new places, which might mean a bigger problem causing a shift in the house. Look above doors for cracks.
- Check walls for popped screws and nails on drywall or new cracks in plaster.
- Point a flashlight into the fireplace and up the chimney, checking for loose bricks, cracks, signs of animal nests, or excess soot that could spark a chimney fire.
- Make sure the damper operates properly.
- Check around ceiling fans to be sure they're well secured to the ceiling and not working their way loose with all the summer use.
- Jiggle the stair balustrade to test its sturdiness, and take note where balusters and banisters have come loose.
- Test all smoke and CO2 detectors and replace batteries immediately if something doesn't work.

## **DOORS AND WINDOWS**

- Examine weatherstripping around exterior doors and windows for tears and wear.
- Look for cracks in window glass and glazing around panes.
- Check the action of the windows for sticking points.
- Look for peeling paint and other signs of wear on window frames and stools, usually in the bottom corners. Check that weep holes in the sill outside haven't been caulked over, inhibiting drainage.
  
- Take a look at thresholds for cracks that could let water reach the sill.

## **ATTIC**

- Look around the attic space during daylight hours, with the lights turned off. Look for holes in the roofing that let light in.
- Keep an eye out for signs of animal activity or entry points for animals.
- Check around vents for gaps. Look at fan motors for frayed wiring or loose screws.
- Feel around insulation for damp spots where leaks might be occurring. Look for missing or torn insulation, which could be a sign of animal activity.

- Examine joists and rafters for structural damage.

## **GARAGE**

- Check the action of the garage door and look for dents in the tracks or cracks in the door.
- Make sure tool storage and hanging rakes and shovels don't create a falling or tripping hazard.

## **KITCHEN**

- Test the drainage of the sink and look for signs of leaks on the faucet.
- Look at all the cabinet doors and drawers to make sure they open and close properly. Check for loose hinges or sticking drawer slides.
- Turn on the disposer and listen for signs of obstructions or problems with the motor.
- Try all the stove burners to be sure they turn on quickly and properly, without sparking or bursts of flame. Make sure gas stoves give off an even blue flame.
- Check the oven door gasket for signs of wear and tear.
- Turn on a gas broiler to make sure it lights properly.
- Make sure the gas shutoff valve is working. It should be able to turn until its completely perpendicular to the pipe.
- Open the dishwasher and spin and lift the washer arm by hand to make sure it isn't stuck. Check that nothing has dislodged the drain hose; it should arc up to prevent backwash from the drain into the dishwasher.
- Look for signs of leaking under and around the dishwasher.
- Make sure water filters have been changed recently.