

MSU-ES Dawg Tracks



February, 2008 *Ten Simple Ways to Winterize the Home*



“A house is a home when it shelters the body and comforts the soul.”

Winter is upon us! Time for the t-bogs, mittens, scarves and high utility bills. Checking the winterization of our homes is a smart way to save money and also the added benefit of keeping our homes warm and cozy during the colder part of our year.

- **Insulate Yourself** – Extra insulation costs are low compared to the cost of utility dollars. In the past (not sure if they still do this) but TVA would come into your home and tell you how much insulation you will need to get to the acceptable level. Your local utility company may offer this same service, It’s worth a call. It has been stated that you should have a minimum of 12” insulation in your attic, regardless of climate conditions.
- **Wrap the Pipes** – It’s better to wrap them in advance of a cold freeze than to wait and face a busted pipe at 20 degrees. Styrofoam cups on faucets and taped for security have been used in for their protection. Also, there are fiberglass covers with screw tighteners for cold protection. Pipe wrappings are available at hardware and discount stores.
- **Clean the Gutters** – Gutters that aren’t clean will freeze with the leaves and other debris and can cause a pseudo-dam, allowing water to back up and seep to the facial boards and maybe into the house. When the leaves have fallen, clean them out and then rinse the gutters out with water so that they are sure to drain freely. Make sure that the gutters are carrying the water away from the house. The rule of thumb is that water should be at least 10 feet away from the house.
- **Block the Leaks** – One of the best traits of winterization is to block out all leaks in and outside of the house. EarthWorks Groups states that the average American home has leaks that amount to the size of a 9-foot square hole.
- **Check the Alarms**- Check your smoke detectors, if you have them. If not, consider them for all your living areas. A good rule of thumb is to change batteries when the time changes.

*YOU GET WHAT YOU INSPECT --
NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT!*

Excerpts: www.ririanproject.com

At the same time, it would be good to take an incense stick or a small lighted torch and check under doors, inside and out, around outdoor faucets, vents and other places where there might be air drafts coming in. After locating these points, you can take the proper steps with insulation to cover these areas and other areas that you might find.

- **Check the Furnace** – The first thing to do is to turn the furnace on to make sure that it will light and run. Assuming this is in order, let it run for a few minutes and you will smell an odd odor. Have no fear; it will dissipate in a few minutes. If the smell continues for a long period of time, turn it off and call a professional. Many heating contractors tell us that it is a good idea to have the furnace cleaned each year. The cost is around \$100 to \$150 dollars. The inspector should:
 - ~ Make sure that the thermostat and pilot light are working properly.
 - ~ Make sure that the fuel line to the furnace doesn’t have a leak.
 - ~ Check the heat exchanger for cracks - a crack can send carbon monoxide into the house.
 - ~ Change the filter.
- **Get your Ducts in a Row**- the US Department of Energy has determined that if the duct work isn’t connected securely and properly, you can lose up to 60% of your heated air before it reaches the vents. In most cases, ducts aren’t easy to see, but the effort will more than pay for it and doing it right upon the initial inspection will help to avoid a repeat each year.
- **Reverse the Fans** – if you have ceiling fans in your rooms, reverse the rotation as it will push the warm air downward and force it to recirculate. Here is how to check the rotation. When you look up, the blades should be turning clockwise and by flipping the switch on the fan, it will reverse.
- **Face your Windows** – If you have single pane windows, it would be wise to replace with double pane insulated storm windows. Even though they are expensive, you may be able to budget for a couple a year or every six months until the project is complete. An alternative is temporary, but does help. That is to purchase an insulator kit with plastic sheeting and double sided adhesive tape. The sheeting is applied by using a hair dryer to put on the shrink-wrap. I’m told that it does work and can be removed in the spring.
- **Don’t forget the Chimney**- The chimney needs to be inspected before each heating season, but probably not cleaned but every other year. This can be determined at the time of the inspection.