BBB Tip: Fall Home Maintenance… Your To-Do List for a Worry-Free Winter!

Submitted by Kelvin H. Collins, President/CEO, Better Business Bureau

Serving the Fall Line Corridor, Inc. • BBB.org/central-georgia • Office: 478.742.9034 (Direct)
OFFICES: Macon: 277 M.L. King Jr. Blvd, Ste 201, Macon, GA 31201 • Augusta: 119 Davis Road, Ste 3-B, Augusta, GA 30907 Columbus: 233 12th Street, Ste 911-B, Columbus, GA 31901

Fall has officially arrived. While cooler temperatures may take their time getting here, now is a good time to prepare your home for the colder months ahead.

Our winters may be relatively mild, but freezing temperatures, heavy rain, strong winds and occasional winter storms can still cause expensive problems. A little preventive maintenance this fall can help protect your home, improve comfort and reduce the chance of an emergency repair later.

BBB offers this fall home-maintenance checklist.

Check Your Roof and Gutters

Summer thunderstorms can be tough on roofs. Look for missing, loose or damaged shingles, signs of leaks and damaged flashing.

Clean leaves, pine straw and other debris from gutters and make sure downspouts direct water away from your foundation. Clogged gutters can cause water to back up under roofing materials or overflow around the foundation. If you aren't comfortable inspecting your roof yourself, hire a qualified professional rather than climbing onto it.

Have Your Heating System Serviced

Don't wait for the first cold night to discover that your heating system isn't working properly. Replace or clean filters as recommended by the manufacturer and consider having your system inspected before heating season. Preventive maintenance can help identify problems before they become expensive emergency repairs.

If your home uses a fuel-burning furnace or other heating equipment, proper maintenance is particularly important because malfunctioning equipment can produce carbon monoxide.

Test Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Test your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and replace batteries when needed. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends having working carbon monoxide alarms on every level of the home and outside sleeping areas. Smoke alarms should be installed on every level and inside bedrooms.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for testing and replacing alarms.

Seal Drafts Before Cold Weather Arrives

Check around windows and exterior doors for air leaks. Caulk and weather stripping can help keep cold air outside and conditioned air inside.

Also look around areas where plumbing, electrical wiring, cable or other utilities enter your home. Sealing small openings can improve energy efficiency and help keep insects and rodents from moving indoors as temperatures fall.

Protect Your Pipes

Freezing temperatures don't happen every day in our area, which can make homeowners less prepared when a hard freeze does occur. Insulate exposed pipes in crawl spaces, attics, garages and other unheated areas. Know where your home's main water shutoff is located in case a pipe bursts. home's main water shutoff is located in case a pipe bursts.

Disconnect garden hoses when freezing weather approaches and protect outdoor faucets as appropriate for your home. Taking care of these things before a freeze is much easier than trying to find supplies or a plumber after temperatures have already dropped.

Trim Trees and Clean Up the Yard

Inspect trees around your home for dead or damaged limbs that could fall during strong winds, heavy rain or ice. Keep branches away from the roof and remove leaves and debris that can clog drainage areas or provide shelter for pests.

Large or hazardous tree work is generally best left to a qualified tree-service professional.

Have Your Fireplace and Chimney Checked

If you use a fireplace, make sure it and the chimney are ready before lighting the first fire of the season. Creosote buildup and obstructions can create fire and ventilation hazards. Make sure the damper operates properly and have the chimney inspected and cleaned when needed.

Never use a fireplace or other fuel-burning appliance if you suspect a ventilation problem.

Prepare for Power Outages

Fall is also a good time to check flashlights, batteries, portable chargers and other emergency supplies. If you own a portable generator, test and maintain it according to the manufacturer's instructions before you actually need it.

Never operate a portable generator inside a home, garage, basement, crawl space or shed — even with doors or windows open. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends operating portable generators outside at least 20 feet from the home, with the exhaust directed away from windows, doors and vents. Carbon monoxide is colorless and odorless and can kill within minutes.

Don't Forget Your Emergency Plan

Review your family's emergency plan and make sure everyone knows what to do during severe weather or an extended power outage.

Check your emergency supplies, medications, pet supplies, flashlights, and backup power sources. Make sure important phone numbers and insurance information are easy to access. Ready.gov provides planning resources and emergency-supply checklists.

Be Careful Who You Hire

Fall maintenance often means hiring someone for roofing, HVAC service, tree work, chimney cleaning, plumbing, or other projects. Don't hire based solely on a social media recommendation, advertisement, or someone showing up at your door.

Research the company at BBB.org, check references, and verify required licensing and insurance. Get multiple written estimates for significant projects and make sure the contract clearly describes the work, materials, price, and payment schedule. Be cautious about paying the entire cost upfront and don't let someone pressure you into making an immediate decision.

Bottom Line

A few hours spent preparing your home this fall could prevent a much larger headache this winter. Check the roof and gutters, service your heating system, protect exposed pipes, test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, inspect trees, and prepare for possible power outages.

And when a project requires professional help, do your homework before you hire. Visit BBB.org to research businesses, check BBB Business Profiles, and find BBB Accredited Businesses in your area.

****

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, which serves 77 counties across Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina. BBB helps consumers make informed marketplace decisions, promotes trustworthy business practices and provides resources to help consumers avoid scams. To research a business, file a complaint, submit a customer review or report a scam, visit BBB.org. For assistance from your local BBB, call 800-763-4222 or email info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.