

It's time to get a grip: Winter is coming

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Don't let the topsy-turvy weather of the last few weeks fool you. Like it or not, winter is coming.

Denial won't prevent it — yes, I'm talking to you in the open-toed sandals and short-sleeved shirt — and it won't do your home any favours either.

According to Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors (CAHPI) president Michael Guihan, the time is now to begin preparing for the winter winds and snow.

"Most people don't get ready for winter at all," Guihan tells me over the phone from Newfoundland.

The reasons for the lack of preparation have as much to do with a lack of knowledge about our homes as the fact that we outsource so much of our lives, he says.

"The lives we lead today are so busy that the seasons tend to sneak up on us," says Guihan.

He notes that it's not everyone who is struggling under the weight of the task. Most of the homes in which he finds poor seasonal maintenance belong to older people who can no longer keep up with chores they used to do and younger people who never learned how.

But he adds that the resources are out there if we want to learn and the winter weather won't go easier on those that don't.

"People need to take time to fix the little things before they become big things."

So pull on your overalls, grab your utility gloves and head out to the great unknown that is your home. Guihan suggests starting with one of these commonly neglected areas:

Give exterior faucets the winter off: "Unless you have a frost-free type (found in some modern homes), you need to prepare your exterior faucets for the season," says Guihan.

Start by turning off the water supply to the faucet and then make sure the faucet itself is left in an open position. Closing the exterior faucet could cause any water already resting in the pipes to freeze once the cooler weather sets in.

Rescue your overburdened eavestrough: "The majority of houses in Canada have eavestroughs and nobody ever cleans them out," says Guihan.

Winter weather means that whatever is in there now — leaves, dirt, debris — will freeze if not removed and create a plug that will prevent melting snow or rain from properly draining. Removing those things now when the weather's still favourable will save you time and money down the road, he advises.

What's good enough for the eavestrough is good enough for the window well: Turns out those wells

that surround basement windows at ground level aren't just there for aesthetics. Guihan cautions. Leaves, dirt and debris need to be removed from here as well.

"You always want to keep these as clean and clear as possible," he says adding that wells that also have built-in drains require even stricter attention.

What goes into your vents must come out: "Anything venting air to and from your house you will want to keep clean," says Guihan in a voice that suggests that this is common sense.

Although the vents usually have covers on them and may even have screens inside to prevent debris from getting into your home, Guihan says that dead bugs, dirt and leaves may accumulate on the inside and impede air flow. No need for fancy equipment though. Guihan suggests you "use a brush or your hands to remove any debris."

Don't forget to look up: Check your roof and pay attention to the condition of shingles. "You can extend the lifetime of your roof significantly by doing a little maintenance," says Guihan. He says that you can add five or six years to the lifespan of your roof by replacing worn shingles and securing loose ones.

"Check your roof every year, towards the end of the year," he says. "Check the chimney for cracks and if you find one get it repaired immediately." The \$300-\$400 cost for the repair will be nothing compared to the thousands it will cost if the deterioration continues.

Keep winter outside: Now that the cool winds are blowing, it is a good time to check windows for draft, says Guihan. He adds that indoor window screens that can act as a block or hindrance to airflow should be removed in the winter

"Mildew can form against the inside of the windows in winter because of the screens," says Guihan, before pausing to add, "besides it will give you a chance to clean the screen, too."

For more tips and ideas on preparing your home for seasonal changes visit the CAHPI website at <http://www.cahpi.ca/ArticleDetail.aspx?ArticleID=36> or the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corp. website at http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/maho/gemare/gemare_003.cfm

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