

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

The purchase of a home is one of the largest investments an individual will make and it is imperative that you keep it in the best possible condition. Whether you are a long time homeowner or thinking about putting your home on the market to sell, routine maintenance should not be neglected. Routine maintenance is a vital element of home ownership. In fact, a little time and investment periodically in the form of routine maintenance now, may very well save you costly repairs and anguish in the future.

If you are a first-time homeowner, you've probably realized that homeownership is not a turnkey operation. It requires ongoing contributions of time, money and some elbow grease. Actually, homeownership is a part-time hobby that requires ongoing attention on a regular basis.

Do you know how long your roof will last? Or how long your heating and air conditioning system will last? Knowing the life expectancy of your home's components can help you determine how to deal with the inevitable. The National Association of Home Builders recently helped create a study that outlines the longevity of housing components. For an in-depth look at the report's findings and tips for prolonging all your home's parts, I recommend that you visit their website at www.nahb.org.

Here are a few examples of tasks that should be on your annual homeowner checklist:

- Your chimney should be inspected and cleaned.
- Check grading around your house and confirm water is draining away from the property.
- Examine the foundation for cracks, dampness, water stains, as well as termite paths.
- Examine around windows for drafts and confirm weather stripping fits tightly.
- Check your attic area's roof for rotted wood or dampness for leaks.
- Keep your heating and cooling system in peak condition by regularly changing filters (every one to three months), cleaning and adjusting burners and by keeping shrubbery around the air conditioner's condensing unit trimmed. Having a specialty company come out twice a year to clean the coils and tighten all the electrical connections is a good idea to make sure your unit is not pulling too much power will also go a long way toward maintaining the unit.
- Asphalt roof shingles typically need to be replaced after about 20 years. Cleanliness is the key to longevity. Trim overhanging trees and keep valleys free of debris.
- Remove debris and clutter from gutters and down spouts. Make sure downspouts are pointing away from the home's foundation because water is the single biggest enemy of masonry and concrete foundations. It's a good idea to go under your house once a year to check for leaks, cracks or damage.
- Checking under kitchen and bathroom sinks and making sure toilets are properly sealed can keep plumbing leaks from becoming expensive foundation problems.
- Keeping appliances clean will help them operate more efficiently. Keeping your refrigerator's coils and door gasket clean will make for a better seal, cut down on energy loss and prevent wear and tear on the motor. When it comes to the dishwasher, the more you use it the longer it is likely to operate. Infrequent use causes gaskets to dry out and results in leaks.

Regular inspection and maintenance of your home will protect its value and condition. I wouldn't recommend you try to tackle any serious projects such as electrical or conditions involving gas or plumbing. Items of that nature should always be delegated to licensed experts. But simple repairs are skills certainly worth learning. Homeowners should take the attitude that home maintenance is required. Your property will decrease in value if you let it fall into disrepair.

Real Estate Talk is written by Dan Douglas, owner and broker-in-charge of Douglas & Company Real Estate, LLC. For questions or comments, please contact him at (803) 945-0301 or email at dan@douglasandcompanyllc.com.