

You've finally done it—you've just moved into your brand new home. The smell of fresh paint still permeates the air. You're likely consumed with unpacking, setting up furnishings, rearranging, decorating—energized by the blank pallet you have to work with. But once you've signed the thick pile of closing documents, the moving trucks have left and everything is neatly in its place, what do you do next? It's time to get a handle on the routine maintenance you'll need to perform in order to ensure that you and your family live comfortably in your new home for years to come. Here's some advice to get you started and help save money while you're at it:

Maintaining a clean home will ensure it will last longer and work better. Dust and dirt, if allowed to accumulate, can harm the finishes on blinds, cabinets, countertops, floors, sinks, tubs, toilets, walls, tiles and other items. If dirt does accumulate, make sure to clean it with a substance that does not scratch or damage the finishes.

On the outside of your home, make sure that gutters and downspouts do not get clogged with leaves or other objects. The exterior of your house is built to withstand exposure to the elements, but a periodic cleaning will improve the appearance and, in many instances, prolong the life of siding and other exterior products.

Here are some additional tips for properly maintaining specific systems in your new home.

Appliances

Remember to read the instruction manual for every appliance in your new home. The manuals provide recommended cleaning and maintenance schedules and sometimes your warranty will become void if you don't follow these recommendations.

Driveways

If you have an asphalt driveway, remove oil, gasoline and similar substances immediately with soapy water.

To avoid holes in your asphalt driveway, refrain from resting patio furniture or bicycle stands on it.

Do not burn anything on your driveway.

Gutters and Downspouts

Clear away leaves, tree limbs and other debris from gutters and downspouts.

Downspouts should be turned away from your home's foundation.

Every four to six years, paint gutters that are not made of aluminum or vinyl to help prevent rust.

Heating and Cooling Systems

Late summer or early fall are the ideal time to do an annual inspection and cleaning of these systems.

Make sure you change the filters every three months.

Keeping your pilot light burning during the summer will help keep the furnace dry and prevent corrosion.

Registers help regulate the flow of air and maintain the desired temperature in your home. Keeping registers closed in rooms you don't use will save on cooling/heating costs.

Using heat generating appliances in the evening and reducing the number of lights on will help keep the temperature down and save on costs during the summer.

Plumbing

Every member of your family should know where the intake valves are located. Label each one.

If any of your appliances develops a leak, inspect your drain trap. A partially clogged drain can cause overflow. Use a plunger or a plumber's snake to unclog the drain. If you need to, use boiling water to help unclog a partially opened drain. Call a plumber if these techniques don't work.

A worn washer, a loose part in a faucet or steam in a hot water pipe generally causes a noisy pipe. Do not hesitate to repair the noise because vibrations can follow the noise and lead to leaks.