



BLUEPRINT FOR HOMEOWNER MAINTENANCE

ADDAPTED BY

PATTERSON HOMES

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on the purchase of your new home! We at Patterson Homes, along with all of our subcontractors, know what an exciting and over whelming time this can be. To try and help, we've created this "Blueprint for Homeowner Maintenance," which has been designed just like a set of constructions plans, to smoothly guide you through some of the important details involved with properly maintaining your new home. We've done the research for you, and have written it down in plain English so it will be easy for you to understand. As a new home warranty provider, we've heard many questions new homeowners ask like:

- "What should I do?"
- "Why should I do it?"
- "When should I do it?"
- "How can I do it?" and,
- "Does the warranty cover it?"

As you will see, we've laid out answers to these questions on the pages that follow. Remember "a stitch in time saves nine" and when applied to your home a littler buyer maintenance and inspection goes a long way in saving you thousands of dollars and a lot of buyer grief. So when you get a moment and things have settled down a bit, sit back, relax, and review our plans, as we take you on a maintenance tour of your new home!

*Please, always remember to check your Home Buyers Warranty Addendum, Construction Standards and Homeowner Warranty Orientations (you can view many of these and other help materials/articles on our website at www.phutah.com - [articles](#) library. As well, you may want to register to receive our newsletter which informs you on such things as proper home winterizing, energy and water conservation, proper insulation ideas, landscaping techniques, decorating ideas, home maintenance reminders, etc.) or ask your Patterson Homes representative about possible warranty coverage before hiring a contractor to perform any corrective work.

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AFTER THE MOVE

- ❑ Notify post office, insurance companies, credit card companies, magazine subscriptions, professional organizations, friends, family, etc. Of your new address.
- ❑ Establish utilities in your name (gas, electric, water, cable, telephone, etc.).
- ❑ Change the address on your driver's license or apply for a new one if moving from another state.
- ❑ Register your children in school.
- ❑ Introduce yourself to the new neighbors.
- ❑ Register your vehicles if moving from another state.
- ❑ Register to vote if moving to a new jurisdiction.
- ❑ Offer your old boxes to someone who's moving.
- ❑ Consider purchasing fire extinguishers for each floor of the home and a separate one for the kitchen and garage.
- ❑ Put all your closing documents, warranties, and appliance operation manuals in a common location for easy reference.
- ❑ Fill out and mail-in all manufacturers' warranty information cards for all your new appliances.
- ❑ Identify any Homeowner Association property improvement deadlines. (Landscaping etc.)
- ❑ Store all touch-up paint in a common location (but not near your water heater or furnace).
- ❑ Locate main water and gas shutoff valves.
- ❑ Locate electrical service panel and main shutoff switch.
- ❑ Familiarize yourself with the operation of all appliances and equipment.
- ❑ Install contact paper in kitchen cabinets and drawers if desired.
- ❑ Vacuum out heating/cooling ducts.
- ❑ Put together a first aid kit.
- ❑ Start a basic tool kit for hanging blinds, curtain rods, pictures, reassembling furniture, installing shelves, etc.
- ❑ Take lots of pictures and video of your new house to show your friends, family and co-workers
- ❑ Refer any friends and family who may be interested in purchasing a home in the future to Patterson Construction by registering them on our website. (PattersonConstruction.com)

OUTSIDE THE HOME

What? Examine Roof and Chimneys**Why?** To identify anything that might cause leaks or problems**When?** Twice a year.**How?** For roofs, visually inspect all surfaces from the ground if possible. Look for torn, broken, missing or cracked shingles or tiles, accumulated debris, gaps in flashing, exposed joints, and obstructed bent pipes. Avoid walking on roof tiles – they will crack. Shingle granule deposits found in gutters are normal and common to new roofs. Check that sealed joints around skylight frames are not cracked and in good condition. Look in attic for water stains on underside of roof or wet insulation. Consult with a qualified roofing contractor*, as necessary, for correction of any roofing problems. Always call your homeowners insurance company first, for any storm-related damage.

For Chimneys, look for open gaps between the house and chimney, cracks in mortar or stucco, and minor settlement. Seal gaps with an appropriate caulk and repaint to match as required. Consult with a mason* to re-point or repair mortar and stucco. Never burn pressure-treated wood, Christmas trees, plastic, or flammable liquids in the fireplace. Keep flue closed when not in use to reduce cooling and heating losses. Clean chimney flue once a year. Clean out ashes as necessary – store in a metal container to reduce fire risk.

What? Inspect Gutters and Downspouts**Why?** To make sure they operate as intended.**When?** After every season.**How?** Hire a gutter cleaning service or find a ladder and do it yourself. Leaves and debris will accumulate in the gutters as the seasons change. If you do it your self, carefully climb up to the gutter and scoop out leaves and debris with a small hand shovel. Also, remove debris from the downspouts. (You can sometimes clear these with a hose, but you may have to disassemble the downspout.) After cleaning, consider installing a downspout filter device to keep out debris. Make sure gutters are sloped to drain toward downspouts and that water drains away from the foundation as it discharges from downspouts. When on the ground, inspect gutters from underneath and look for leaks, rust spots or holes. Caulk as necessary.

*If buyer has a finished basement it is highly recommended that buyer uses pipe extensions attached to downspouts to guarantee that water will flow 10 ft. from home.

What? Check Condition of Siding, Paint, Masonry, Stucco or EIFS and Wood Trim**Why?** To maintain its good looks and confirm adequate weather protection.**When?** Twice a year.**How?** Perform a walk-around inspection of the perimeter walls. Over time, normal weathering and minor settlement can cause cracking, peeling, warping, and crumbling in some or all of these materials. Look for cracks in brick, stone, and stucco.

Identify any areas where mortar has fallen out. A white powdery substance known as efflorescence may appear from time to time and is considered normal. Check for warped siding, gaps in wood trim, and peeling or blistering paint. Sand, scrape, wire-brush, caulk, stain, repaint and apply wood preservatives where necessary. Consult with a mason*, as necessary, to repair cracked brick or mortar and traditional stucco problems. Contact a qualified contractor*, as necessary, to repair warped siding.

What? Examine Caulking around Window, Doors and other Areas

Why? To keep out water, air, dust and insects.

When? Once a year.

How? Walk around the house and inspect each caulking joint at window and door frames, between two different siding materials (like brick or stucco), or around piping which enters the home. Original caulking will shrink and crack over time due to normal weathering. Confirm that caulked joints are still properly sealed and haven't cracked, pulled apart, or fallen out. If necessary, clean the old joint out with warm soapy water and a toothbrush and reapply the same caulking material to achieve a proper seal. Consult with your local hardware store to select the right type of caulking.

What? Check Doors and Windows

Why? To verify proper operation, security and weather resistance.

When? Twice a year.

How? Check overall door and window integrity and operation. Windows and doors can be affected by a number of elements including minor settlement, wear and tear, expansion and contraction and general weathering. Check weather-stripping that becomes loose or damaged. Check door and window hardware (hinges, knobs, pins, latches, locks, etc.) Make sure door latch bolts and dead bolts engage properly. Adjust, tighten and lubricate where necessary. Look for binding or rubbing in the frames, cracked panes, and difficult operation, locking problems, cracking or peeling paint or varnish. Adjust, lubricate, clean and re-seal as necessary. Door thresholds can often be adjusted by loosening or tightening the threshold screws.

What? Inspect Condition of Concrete Slabs and Patios

Why? To maintain their cosmetic appeal and intended usage.

When? Once a year. (Preferably each fall before winter)

How? Examine all concrete sidewalks, patios, porches, stoops, and garage slabs for cracks, chipping, stains, scaling or settlement. Consult with your local hardware store for products that can fill and repair cracks or chipping, or remove scaling residue. (Automotive brake cleaning fluid works well to remove most concrete stains.). Seal and caulk any large gaps created by minor settlement.

What? Maintain Original Grading, Drainage, and Landscaping

Why? To reduce the possibility of water or foundation damage.

When? At all times.

How? Visually survey your yard and existing drainage patterns. Verify that the ground slopes away from the foundation. Stabilize any bare areas with grass, ground cover or landscaping materials to discourage erosion. Dig out areas where sand has accumulated and fill in any low

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spots where necessary to reestablish drainage flow. Avoid overwatering plants and shrubs which are next to the foundation. Do not install landscape edging which retains foundation with sprinklers. Water, fertilize, mow and aerate your grass as necessary. Consult with a nursery* or landscape professional*, as necessary, to correct or learn more about your local growing conditions.

What? Check out Condition of Septic Tank & Leech Field

When? Once a year.

How? Consult with a septic tank pumping service to pump out the septic tank. The leachfield should be walked and checked for a foul odor, excessive wetness, or overly lush grass growth. The leach field is the areas in your yard where wastewater is discharged into the ground.

INSIDE THE HOME

What? Inspect the Attic

Why? To look for any changes since construction.

When? Twice a year.

How? Prior to entering the attic, purchase a paper filter mask from you local hardware store to avoid lung irritation from possible airborne insulation fibers. Bring flashlight. Gain access through the trap door and check that all air vents are unobstructed and intact. Make sure there are no animals nesting in the insulation. If you walk around, be careful not to step on the drywall ceiling below, and watch out for nails sticking through the roof. Never store anything in the attic unless it was designed for that purpose. Check with your builder for more information regarding storage capacity or lack thereof.

What? Monitor and Maintain Floor Coverings

Why? To keep them looking great and preserve their longevity.

When? As required.

How? For carpet, vacuum often. As a rule of thumb you should vacuum once a week for each person that lives in you home, also blot-up stains as they occur. Use a manufacturer-approved carpet cleaning product as needed - Test spray for color fastness in an inconspicuous location (like a closet). Use mats or rugs near outside doors to reduce soil tracking. Always lift furniture when moving it around – never drag it. Have carpets professionally cleaned once a year.

For ceramic or marble tile, sweep or vacuum often. To clean, use a dishwasher crystal and water solution applied to a damp sponge. Check for cracks in the grout. Apply matching grout as necessary to fill cracks. Check caulking near bathtubs and baseboards. Caulk should be well adhered to both surfaces – clean surface and re-caulk as necessary. Make sure all furniture legs have floor protectors installed. Always lift furniture when moving – never slide it across tiles. Use mats or rugs near outside doors to collect dirt.

For hardwood floors, sweep or vacuum often. Use non-rubber backed mats or throw rugs to minimize exposure to sand and grit. To clean, damp-mop with a mixture of one cup vinegar to one gallon of water – never wet-mop or wax. If occasional squeaks occur, apply some powdered graphite to the area. The appearance of small splinters is common for new hardwood floors. Avoid exposure to prolonged sunlight and high-heeled shoes (without their rubber heel protector's in-place). Have the floor professionally filled and re-finished once a year in heavy traffic. Make sure all furniture legs have floor protectors installed. Always lift furniture when moving – never slide it across the wood. Never allow water to sit on the surface for an extended period of time.

For vinyl or other resilient-type flooring, sweep, vacuum or damp mop often. To “wax” your no-wax floor, use acrylic finishes recommended by the manufacturer. Excessive water near seams can cause separation, lifting or curling. High heels will damage these floor types. Install floor protectors on furniture legs and lift furniture when moving - don’t slide!

What? Maintain Wall Finishes

Why? To preserve their good looks and longevity.

When? As required

How? For drywall, check for cracks at windows, doors, corners, and ceilings, repair with two to three coats of joint compound, sand and repaint when convenient. Minor cracks can be filled with a heavy coat of matching paint. Look for any nail pops or protrusions. Reset offending nails deeper into drywall, then repeat drywall repair. Most drywall cracks will occur after a heating or cooling season with the change in humidity. (Air conditioners provide very dry air as they cool.) Consult with a drywall contractor*to retexture, as necessary

For paint or stain, look for peeling, cracking, blistering, fading, or scuff marks. Scrape off paint from any damaged area. Flat paint can be touched-up with a small brush and matching paint. Semi-gloss and glossy paint can be touched-up or wiped off with a damp sponge to clean. Stain can often be rejuvenated with a good quality furniture polish.

For wallpaper, look for loose or curling seams. Changes in humidity can cause seams to separate – reattach with a compatible wallpaper seam adhesive. Keep water and condensation away from all seams. Clean surface as necessary with a damp sponge.

For brick or stone veneer, periodically check for cracks in the mortar. Changes in humidity can cause mortar to shrink. Consult with qualified mason, as necessary, to re-paint cracks and match existing mortar.

What? Monitor and Maintain Cabinets and Countertops

Why? To maintain their good looks, durability, and intended usage.

When? As required.

How? For cabinets, check out the hardware. Adjust, tighten or lubricate knobs, hinges, latches, rollers, and drawer glides. Refresh varnished wood cabinets with a good quality furniture polish once a month. Never use a paraffin-based spray wax. Painted cabinets may be cleaned with a mild non-abrasive detergent on a damp sponge. Scratches can be filled with a matching touch-up crayon available at most hardware stores.

For laminate countertops, verify that any caulking joints are in good condition and well-adhered to both sides of the joint – water can cause underlying wood material to swell when wetted. Clean joint and re-caulk with matching material as necessary. Avoid placing hot items such as pots, pans, cigarettes and irons on countertop laminate – heat can liquefy the underlying glue. Never cut on you new countertops – always use a cutting board. Clean with a mild, non-abrasive detergent on a damp sponge or washrag – don’t use scrubby pads. Avoid prolonged exposure of dishwasher steam to underside of countertop-high humidity and condensation may cause wood warping under laminate.

For ceramic tile countertops, inspect grout and tile for cracks. Replace cracked tiles and re-grout as necessary. White grout can be refreshed by applying a diluted bleach solution with a stiff narrow brush.

What? Monitor and Maintain Doors

Why? To ensure proper operation, security, and intended usage.

When? Twice a year.

How? Examine the hardware (hinges, knobs, pins, latches, locks, tracks, etc.). Make sure latch bolts and locks function properly. Adjust, tighten or lubricate where necessary. Spray graphite into keyholes and onto hinges when lubricating – never use oil. Also, don't forget to lubricate the tracks for sliding and pocket doors. Paint or seal top and bottom of doors to reduce moisture penetration and wood shrinking or swelling. Don't sand or plane a door until it has been exposed to the various moisture changes of every season.

What? Visually Survey Wood Trim

Why? To preserve its good looks.

When? Once a year.

How? Examine all baseboards, chair rails, crown molding, door frames and window frames, changing humidity levels can cause wood to shrink, crack and warp. Look for dust accumulation, cracks, corner separations, or warping. Wipe off dust with a damp sponge. For stained trim, treat with a good quality furniture polish. For cracks or corner separations, fill in gaps with matching wood putty. Treat with furniture polish for stained wood, or repaint with matching wood putty for stained wood or touch-up paint for painted wood.

What? Inspect the foundation, Basement or Crawl Space

Why? To identify any leaks or problems.

When? Twice a year

How? For slab-on-grade foundations, walk the entire ground floor and look for water stains or cracks in the concrete. Remove stains with an appropriate concrete cleaning agent. Seal cracks that may allow water to enter with a compatible waterproof caulk. Both can be found at your local hardware store.

For basement foundations, walk the entire floor and perimeter walls. Look for water stains or cracks (greater than one-eighth inch in width) in the concrete or cinderblocks. Inspect sump pit if applicable. If there is water in the pit, verify that sump pump is operational by pouring additional water into the pit to trigger pump, or install a pump if absent. Remove stains with an appropriate concrete cleaning agent. Seal cracks with a compatible waterproof caulk. Again, both can be found at your local hardware store.

For crawl space foundations, gain access to crawl space through the trap door. Inspect concrete or cinder block walls. Look for water stains or cracks. Seal cracks that may allow water to enter with a compatible waterproof caulk. Check ground surface for any standing water. Inspect sump pit if applicable. If there is water in the pit, verify that sump pump is operational by pouring water into the pit to trigger pump, or install a pump if absent. Locate all air vents. Verify that they're open and unobstructed by insulation or other debris.

What? Test Appliances

Why? To ensure proper operation.

When? As Required.

How? Take the time to read each owner manual. These documents contain maintenance and formal operating procedures along with warranty information. If appliance is not working and there is no helpful information in the owner's manual, check the circuit breaker in the main electrical panel. If the breaker is tripped, switch it to "off" then back to "on". If this still doesn't help, call the customer service phone number listed in the owner's manual for assistance. Be prepared to supply the date of purchase (closing date), the serial and model numbers and a brief description of the problem.

What? Inspect the Plumbing System

Why? To verify proper operation and intended usage.

When? Twice a year.

How? Simultaneously turn on the water at all sinks bathtubs and showers; operate dishwasher and washing machine; and flush all toilets. Check on all drains first to make sure nothing overflows. Then, look for any leaks in the water and sewer pipes. Look in cabinets, closets, on the floor, under lower level ceilings and in the basement or crawl spaces (if applicable). Water pipes will be copper (metal) or a gray plastic sewer pipes will be white or black plastic. If freezing temperatures occur, make sure to disconnect the outside garden hoses to keep inner water pipes from freezing and bursting at the spigot. If any water line leaks are found, locate the shutoff valve nearest to the leak and turn the valve to the right (clock-wise) until tight. If any sewer line leaks are found, try to trace the piping back to the area it serves and discontinue use of those fixtures until repairs are made. Consult with a qualified plumber as necessary.

What? Maintain Plumbing Fixtures and Appliances

Why? To ensure proper operation.

When? As required.

How? For sinks, turn on the hot and cold water and observe for adequate water pressure and drainage. If water pressure is low, unscrew the piece (aerator) at the end of the faucet and inspect the filter screen. Wash out any trapped pieces of debris, then reinstall. If sink is slow to drain, you can try some drain cleaner to see if that helps, but use a funnel when pouring to avoid splashing acid on the basin surface. Drain cleaners should not be used if your home is on a septic system. Another alternative to clear a drain would be to disassemble the trap ("U"-shaped pipe) under the sink to try to clear any obstruction. Put a bucket under the trap first since it usually contains a small amount of water. This also works well for fishing out small valuables that go down the drain. To clean sink surfaces, use a non – abrasive cleanser and warm water on a damp sponge.

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For bathtubs and showers, operate the cold and hot water and check for adequate water pressure and drainage. If you notice low water pressure in the shower, unscrew the showerhead and flush it out, against the direction of normal flow, to clear any debris. A rubber plunger can usually unclog any drain obstructions. If that doesn't work, you can try some drain cleaner to see if that helps, but again, use a funnel when pouring to avoid splashing acid on the tub or shower surface. Drain cleaners should not be used if your home is on a septic system. Clean surfaces with a non-abrasive cleanser and warm water on a damp sponge. Use brass cleaner on solid brass fixtures- not coated brass.

For toilets, clean often using a non-abrasive cleanser. Avoid scrubbing bowl too hard with a toilet brush – bristle rod may scratch porcelain. Avoid using drop – in type cleaners. Never mix cleaners especially those containing bleach. If toilet clogs and begins to overflow, turn off water supply at shutoff valve near the floor. Use a rubber plunger or something called a “coil spring auger” to clear any clogs. If toilet runs constantly, try adjusting the float mechanism in the tank to shut off fill-water sooner. Never flush baby wipes sanitary napkins, dental floss, hair, grease, motor oil, paper towels or cups, diapers, small dead pets, etc. Condensation on the outside of the tank is not a leak – try purchasing a tank cover if desired.

For spas or jetted tubs, see “bathtubs” above for cleaning suggestions. To avoid motor damage, never operate jets unless outlet ports are covered by at least three inches of water. If jets don't work, check to see if GFI outlet switch is tripped in the tub equipment housing area.

For garbage disposals, always use cold water when operating – hot water causes food to be cut less efficiently by the blades and causes grease to liquefy which may solidify in your trap and cause a clog. Avoid putting fruit peels or vegetable peels down the disposer, which may also clog the trap. If disposer won't operate, unplug unit and manually try to rotate the inner chamber from the bottom with the included Allen wrench. If you can't find the wrench, a broomstick used as a lever arm from the topside may also work. After you've given the chamber a few turns, plug it back in and press the reset which is on the bottom of the unit and try again. Always check and push the small (red) reset button on the bottom of the disposal. Consult with a qualified repairman, as necessary.

For hot water heaters, take the time to read the manufacturer's operation manual that explains how to periodically drain and refill the tank for optimal performance. Hot water heaters use either an electric coil or natural gas to heat the water. With an electric water heater check that the temperature setting is set on “B”, “Normal” or 140 degrees. For natural gas units, there is a pilot light and a main burner that heats the water. If the pilot light goes out, read the re – lighting instructions found on the side of the tank. Never turn on electricity to the unit or light the pilot if it has an empty tank. Always shut off the electric or gas supply before turning off the water supply.

When away from your home for an extended period, turn the temperature down to its lowest setting. Never store combustible materials near a natural gas unit. Fumes are often heavier than air and can make their way to the pilot light. Vacuum often near the base of the unit to keep dust from interfering with the flame. Avoid using the top of the water heater as a storage shelf. Test the pressure relief valve at least once a year by briefly pulling up on the lever and confirming water discharge. Stay away from end of discharge pipe when performing this test – scalding danger. Condensation at bottom of inner tank and above flame is not a leak. Water dripping from the bottom of the outer tank may be a leak. Consult with a qualified plumber* as necessary.

What? Check your Heating and Cooling System or Swamp Cooler

Why? To verify proper operation

When? Air conditioner - just before the cooling season; Heat Pump or Furnace – just before the heating season; Swamp Cooler – before it freezes, early fall.

How? For air conditioners, turn on system only when outside air temperature is greater than 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Set thermostat to desired temperature or to a temperature slightly higher than normal if away from home during the day. (This will allow for quicker cooling to your desired temperature at night rather than trying cooling a hot house.) If air conditioner does not operate, check thermostat if set to “Cool” setting. If that doesn’t work, check the circuit breakers. There are two: one which controls the compressor and one that controls the fan. Verify that both are in the “On” position. If either is tripped, switch it to the “Off” position then to the “On” position. If that doesn’t work, call a qualified HVAC contractor* for assistance as necessary.

If the system is operating properly, ensure that the condensation drain tube is draining water and is unobstructed. (It’s usually a clear plastic tube located next to the heat pump which drains into a floor drain or to the outside) Shut off any humidifiers and change the furnace filter every other month or more frequently when needed. Verify that the outside compressor unit operates free and clear of any debris and don’t forget to remove any protective cover left on the unit over the winter.

In general, shield the inside of your home from direct sunlight and outside air. Radiation from the sun will heat your walls, floors and furniture. Outside air contains heat and humidity. Both will significantly slow the cooling process. Consider installing ceiling fans where desirable. They help with air circulation and enable the system to operate more efficiently. Make sure all cooling and return air vents are clean, clear and unobstructed. Set air vent vanes upward on lower floors and slightly downward on upper floors. Air blowing from the vents should be noticeably cool. If not, there may be a refrigerant leak somewhere. Again, consult with a qualified HVAC contractor* as necessary.

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For a heat pump or a natural gas furnace, turn on the system. (Heat pumps should not be operated unless outside air temperature is below 65 degrees Fahrenheit.) Set thermostat at desired temperature. If the system does not operate, check to see that thermostat is set to "Heat" setting. In addition, check that fan panel on furnace unit is secure. (There is a switch behind the panel that will keep the furnace from operating if the panel is loose.) If that doesn't work, check the circuit breakers. Verify that breakers are in the "ON" position. If any breakers relating to the fan or compressor are tripped, switch them to the "OFF" position then to the "ON" position. Otherwise, consult with a qualified HVAC contractor* for assistance as necessary.

If the system is operating properly, confirm that noticeably warm air is blowing out of the air vents. A mild odor is common the first time you turn on the heat and should dissipate shortly. Also, check that any auxiliary heaters are operational (heat pump). If you have natural gas heat and smell a strong odor of gas, leave the home immediately and call the gas company from a neighbor's house. If your furnace has a pilot light, there will be re-lighting instructions on one of the inside panels for reference in the event it ever goes out. Make sure the fresh air duct near a natural gas unit is open and unobstructed. Occasionally, heat pumps will activate a defrost cycle which will melt ice buildup on the internal coil of the outside unit. When this occurs, steam will be seen rising from the unit. This is normal and not cause for concern.

Allow direct sunlight in whenever possible. Radiation from the sun will heat your walls, floors and furniture and aid the heating system. Consider installing ceiling fans where desirable. They help with air circulation and enable the system to operate more efficiently. Make sure all heating and return air vents are clean, clear and unobstructed. Set air vent vanes slightly downward on lower floors and upward on upper floors. Change the furnace filter every other month or more frequently as needed. Verify that the filter arrow points in the direction of airflow. Have unit serviced once a year.

For those with swamp coolers, you must properly winterize by disconnecting the water line and blowing air through the waterline otherwise remaining water will freeze and burst the line and leak with the spring/summer hookup!

What? Examine the Electrical System

Why? To confirm system performs as intended.

When? Periodically

How? Check the main service panel. Look for rust, water stains, soot stains, or melted wires. Check the circuit breakers. See that they are properly labeled. Do a quick check to verify that the labeled circuit is actually the correct circuit by switching off the breaker and trying some of the devices connected to that circuit. If it's not correctly labeled, re-label it and investigate the remaining circuits. Circuit breakers have three positions: "ON", "OFF", and "tripped". They are designed to allow only a certain amount of electrical current to pass through the wires - Usually 15 to 20 Amps. Circuit breakers will trip or shutdown if that amount of current is exceeded. If any breakers are tripped, switch them to "OFF" then back to "ON". If the breaker trips again, unplug all devices on that circuit. If this corrects the problem, than there are too many devices plugged into this circuit or one of the devices or cords is faulty, unsafe and leaking electrical current. If the breaker continues to trip, consult with a qualified electrician* as necessary.

Check all GFI outlets and breakers. These outlets and switches have those "Test" and "Reset" buttons on them and are ultra current sensitive to protect you from accidental electrocution if you're exposed to water and an electrical device. They can be found in kitchens, bathrooms, garages, basements and in the main service panel. Push the "Test" button at least once a month to trip the circuit. If the "Reset" button doesn't pop outward during this test, consult with a qualified electrician*, as necessary, to replace the GFI switch. If it does pop out, push it back in and repeat next month. Do not plug refrigerators or freezers into a GFI circuit. These appliances experience sudden large power draws that can trip the GFI switch and spoil the food!

In general, keep tree limbs away from any overhead power lines. Always call your electrical utility service to locate underground power lines before digging any deep trenches or holes. If any electrical outlet doesn't work, see if it's controlled by a switch, GFI switch, or if the breaker has tripped, before calling an electrician*. Don't use light bulbs with a higher wattage than the fixture allows. Avoid changing exterior light bulbs in the rain. Never overload extension cords or use too many when bringing power to a Plug sensitive electronic devices such as televisions, computers, printers, VCRs, etc. Into appropriate surge protector strips. Unplug them during lightning storms. If there are small children in the home, install outlet protector guards to keep out little fingers and paper clips!