

Quik Guide to Home Maintenance

Russell Judd Atlanta-Inspections.com 770-841-9009

All house components and systems need tending to on a regular basis.

Heating & air conditioning system (HVAC system):

- Change the air filter/s every 3 months being sure the filter is mounted tight to the body so the air does not go around the filter but only through it. This helps prevent dust build-up in the ducting, duct grills and importantly the blower motor, which can reduce the efficiency and wear out the blower motor prematurely.
- Have a commercial HVAC firm service the whole system annually. Pipefittings can leak coolant, which will cause the units to run unnecessarily and over-heat and damage the outside compressor/s.

Attic units have metal leak pans under them and white plastic pipes
To drain the condenser coil box on the top or side of the air handler.

- Check the leak pans monthly or more during the months of a/c operation to prevent the leak pans from overflowing and damaging ceilings below.
- Put a few drops of bleach down the pipe from the condenser coil box and down the leak pan drain pipe to prevent them from becoming clogged and make sure the leak pan is not full of insulation and debris so it doesn't flow into its drain pipe.
- When the a/c has been on for at least 10 minutes and the air coming out of the duct closest to the air handler is not at least 12 degrees cooler than the interior, call an HVAC firm for service.

Electrical system

- Homes with GFCI's and AFCI's: Most manufacturer's recommend the "trip" buttons on the GFCI units in bathrooms, kitchens, laundries, and basements, water pumps and outside; and the blue AFCI buttons in the circuit breaker panel box be test-tripped at least every 6 months. Don't forget to turn off any computers in bedrooms prior to testing the blue AFCI buttons. If the buttons don't trip or do not reset, have a professional electrician replace with a new GFCI outlet or AFCI breaker.
- Replace any electrical outlet or switch that is loose or worn out to prevent arcing and fire and replace all missing cover plates to prevent shock.

Water Heaters

- Drain all the water out of the tank once a year. This will help prevent silt build-up at the bottom of the tank which can act as an insulating medium between the cold water and the hot flame, causing the unit to run longer and longer (and cost more and more to operate). Turn off the gas to the water heater or the electric heating element first and the cold water to the tank. Connect a garden hose to the drain at the bottom of the tank. Drain the water out. Opening the pressure valve on the top or side of the tank will make the water flow out quicker. When empty, turn on the cold water again and let it flow out the hose. Turn it off when water coming out of the hose is clear. Shut off the drain and fill the tank, then close the pressure valve. Once full, turn the heating unit back on.
- Check the over pressure pipe at the outside every month to see if water is leaking out which indicates the over-pressure valve on the top or side of the tank may be broken.
- Check the pipefittings on top of the tank for corrosion. If there is corrosion have a plumber repair the fittings.
- Check the vent pipe. It should be securely connected to the top of the tank and the "hood" should be located directly over the vent hole. The vent piping should all be securely connected. If not have a plumber repair.

Smoke Alarms

- Push the test button on each alarm at least every 6 months or more often per the manufacturer's instructions to be sure they are operating when needed.

Radon radioactivity levels in the house

- All homes should be tested once for the radioactivity levels and then once every year thereafter. Radon is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer after smoking according to the EPA. Contact this inspector to perform the testing at a competitive fee. For more information see my Website or the EPA Website.

Exterior Siding

- Wood siding needs to be painted when the paint appears to be wearing, usually about once every 7 - 10 years, depending on the quality of the paint of the last paint job. Check at least annually for cracks. They should be caulked closed, including seams between boards and where the boards meet windows and doors, etc and corners to prevent moisture entry and premature deterioration.
- "Composition" or "Hardboard" such as Masonite, Georgia-Pacific and Louisiana-Pacific composition type boarding has a history deteriorating due to absorption of moisture. Brush paint every 5 - 7 years. However, before painting, check semi-annually for open seams between boards; and between boards and windows and doors and corner moldings, which should be sealed with quality caulk. The swollen, soft and deteriorated boards should be replaced. Also check for nail heads that were hammered through the siding boards, as water will deteriorate the boards here. These should be caulked over to prevent moisture entry.
- Vinyl siding should be checked regularly for broken and loose siding after high winds as well as holes caused by hail. The damaged areas should be replaced.
- "Cement" board/"Hardie-Plank" may need to be repainted for the first time after 5 - 7 years due to a thin builder's coat. After that a new coat should be applied when the paint wears thin or about every 7-10 years, whichever occurs first. Check the siding & paint manufacturer's specifications for the correct type paint to use and how often repainting is recommended.
- Masonry should be checked for cracking annually. "Step" cracking and any cracks of 1/8" width or more should be referred to an inspector.
- Synthetic (EIFS) stucco should be checked at least annually by a professional stucco inspection firm for cracks, cracked caulking and moisture levels between the stucco and interior walls, as synthetic stucco can retain moisture that can severely damage the structural framing and all else in proximity. If mold on the interior walls is observed contact a stucco specialist right away. Synthetic stucco should be kept separated from soil by at least 6 - 8" to prevent moisture and termite problems. Be sure that any paint applied complies with the paint and stucco manufacturers' requirements.
- "Hard coat" stucco should be checked by a professional stucco inspector annually for cracking, delaminating and leak problems. Be sure any paint applied complies with the paint and stucco manufacturers' requirements.
- Wood siding tends to crack, which need to be caulked closed whenever observed as they can allow moisture and unconditioned air entry and deteriorate the wood. Painting wood siding typically is needed about every 7-10 years depending on how well the paint has worn; however, some areas may peel and crack and need repainting when found.

Roofing, Gutters, Downspouts & Flashings

- Asphalt composition shingles tend to last about 15 - 20 years depending on many factors. Leaks can develop any time, even when new. Having a 2-layer roof can be a problem in that the 2 layers combined act to retain a lot more heat, which causes creeping and premature wear and leaks. A typical sign that the shingles are entering the latter part of their typical life is they tend to start curling at the corner edges and become brittle, with the surface granules wearing down and off.
- Cedar "shake" shingles may last 20-25 years, possibly more. Signs of aging include warping and cracking requiring an experienced specialist for replacement
- Gutters & downspouts typically are made of aluminum, which will usually last for 15 years or more. Signs of deterioration include rust stains and pinhole leaks, especially found around corner and connection joints. Gutters often tend to need remounting as the long nails tend to pull out resulting in the water pooling at a low spot or not draining down towards the downspout at all. Check at least annually for mounting and drainage problems.
- Clean gutters 2 - 3 times a year including clearing the downspouts for efficient drainage. Gutters holding water are also a local source for mosquitoes.
- Debris buildups on roofing can damage the shingles allowing moisture to penetrate through to and rot the plywood underneath, so all debris should be removed.
- Screen gutter guards tend to accumulate pine straw and leaf debris resulting in wetting of the shingles and rotting of the plywood underneath. So screen Gutter Guards need to be cleaned to!!!
- Metal flashings are located between roofing and exterior siding and usually are virtually invisible. Having a roofer check all flashings annually can stop hidden leaks that can result in expensive repairs.

Gas appliances

- Anytime gas is smelled contact your gas utility company immediately! Gas can explode the whole house!

Foundations and concrete basement slabs

- Check semi-annually for cracks and leaks. Multiple cracks, leaks and those of more than 1/8" should be referred to a specialist. Floor slabs often exhibit cracks from curing shrinkage and/or settlement. If the slab is of different heights either side of the crack, is leaking or more than a 1/4" wide, refer to a specialist.

Plumbing

- Most plumbing installed today is copper piping for the potable water and white plastic PVC drain and waste piping. Neither of these is prone to leaking. However, if the house was built before 1978 there may be some lead in the drinking water from the solder. A lead-in-water test is advised.
- In the 70's and 80's a gray plastic Polybutylene potable water pipe was installed. It has a history of developing pinhole leaks, especially at plastic fittings between pipes. Many owners are now replacing this gray PB pipe to prevent leakage between the walls, which often doesn't become visible until much after the leaking starts, possibly causing mold formation in the walls as well as other damage.
- Blue PB water service pipe buried in the yard may break and you may not know it. Turn off all water in the house and the check to see if the water meter is turning. If it is, then there most likely is a break in your blue PB pipe in the yard. A plumbing firm can replace it with copper pipe.

Commodes

- Check to see if any of the toilets are loose on the floor by pushing on them from the side. Looseness can result in the O-ring between the commode and the waste pipe leaking and damaging sub-flooring and ceilings below. If there is any leaking, including any around the base of the commode, have a plumber replace the O-ring and tighten the commode base floor mounting bolts.

Septic systems

- When to pump the tanks is dependent on usage, age and soil and a lot of "lore". 10 to 12 years is a good general guide. Check the yard for greener grass or wetness. Do you drain pipes "burp"? A commercial septic firm is the best source for testing.