



IS YOUR HOME WINTER READY?

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR PROPERTY SAFE

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PREVENTING PROPERTY DAMAGE

As a homeowner you want to prevent unnecessary damage to your biggest asset, your home. Prevention starts with an awareness of what could go wrong, followed by a few smart checks to make sure your home is safe.

As winter approaches each year, it is important to make sure things are running smoothly in your home and on your property. Cold temperatures and inclement weather can affect homes very quickly, so if your home isn't winter-ready, there is a higher risk of damage.

Read on to find out about the precautions you can take to protect your property.

HOW WINTER CONDITIONS CAN DAMAGE HOMES

First, it's important to understand the type of damage that can occur to your home during the winter months. Cold temperatures, blizzards, hail storms, blowing snow, gusting winds, freezing rain, sleet and ice, freeze and thaw cycles can affect homes in a number of ways that amount to unfortunate, costly repairs.

SNOW & ICE HAZARDS

Heavy snow loads that aren't removed from roofs can add excessive weight to the roof and supporting structures, which can lead to structural damage and in severe conditions, collapse.

Ice on the ground presents a slipping hazard for foot traffic and vehicles. Additionally, large icicles that form off roofs can be dangerous when they break and fall.

ICE DAMS

Ice can also build up to form dams on the edge of roof structures that prevent melting snow from sliding off the roof, making the roof more susceptible to damage and leaking. When the dam creates a barrier, the water cannot escape off the roof and is forced under shingles or other roofing material, which then can seep into the attic, indoor ceilings and walls.

FROZEN PIPES

When temperatures plummet and the extreme cold sets in, exposed pipes in unheated areas or where there are drafts can freeze, crack, and burst, causing water damage and flooding in your home or garage. You should know the location of the shut-off valves so you can turn off the water in case of an emergency.

BLOCKED SEWERS

Large amounts of melting snow and rain can overburden municipal sewer lines. If the public sewer can't handle excess snow melt or rain, the water can make its way into connected sewer lines and back-up into your home, causing flooding - often to the basement / lower-level floors.

WATER DAMAGE

Melting ice and snow can create water accumulation in areas above and below ground. If water collects around your foundation, it can seep into your house or worse, cause bowing. With certain types of construction, freezing water or frozen soil can cause the foundation or piers to heave. In addition, burst pipes, and blocked sewers can cause basement flooding, something that is uncomfortable to deal with during the cold, winter months.

FIRE DAMAGE

When it's cold outside, people look for warmth inside. Chimney fires and fires caused by unattended candles can lead to unsafe conditions, significant home damage, and in some cases, even death.

PREPARING YOUR HOME TO WITHSTAND THE EFFECTS OF WINTER WEATHER

Winter storms and freezing temperatures can threaten the structural integrity of your home, cause unsafe conditions for your family, and lead to costly repairs and interruption to your daily life.

Build a simple winter preparation plan for your home to prevent avoidable damage and for a safe winter season. Start your inspection from the roof of your home and move downwards into the lowest level of your property. The basement is an especially susceptible area for winter damage to settle in and possibly go unnoticed. You can also separate your list into exterior and interior items to check.

PREVENTING DAMAGE TO YOUR HOME'S EXTERIOR

INSPECT YOUR ROOF

Before winter hits, have your roof inspected for any existing damage, such as holes or loose shingles. Clear the leaves and debris from eavestroughs, gutters and roof drains that would otherwise cause blockages to proper water flow. By keeping the gutters clear you will help avoid ice dams in extremely cold temperatures and allow for proper drainage of melting snow.

TURN OFF EXTERIOR WATER

Turn off water access to outdoor garden hoses and faucets to avoid burst pipes, flooding and water waste. Shut down irrigation systems to preserve them through the winter and to avoid problems in the spring.

INSPECT DOWNSPOUTS

Make sure downspouts are pointed away from the foundation of your home. Water that seeps into the soil around your home can enter through cracks and disrupt the foundation, causing basement flooding and damage to walls. Furthermore, once water is in the house and in walls, if not attended to, can cause mold and mildew damage.

WINDOWS AND DOORS

Check the perimeters of windows and doors for cracks and openings. Cold air seepage can result in higher energy bills. Once the cold air enters a warmer room the area around the crack begins to deteriorate. Add weather-stripping around doors and windows to control these air leaks. Keeping the warm air indoors and blocking out cold air will save both money and potential damage.

CRACKS, AIR LEAKS & OPENINGS

Cold air can affect your home in a few ways. Cold air that blows through gaps in the walls or roof will create a draft that reduces the temperature in the room and drives up the energy bill. Use caulking and insulation to seal cracks where air is coming through. Persistent cold air can also damage plumbing lines and lead to water seepage if your property's insulation is not effective and the leaks are unsealed.

AVOID FLOODING & WATER DAMAGE

INSULATE & PROTECT PIPES

Inspect the location of your pipes to identify if there are any cracks in your home's foundation, openings in walls, or areas where the cold air seeps into your house near the pipes. Locations that are especially vulnerable are places where pipes run from inside to outside the home, such as where the dryer vents or water pipes are located. Pipes also freeze when there is not proper insulation in the walls and ceilings that are close to the pipes. Unheated or less heated areas such as garages, attics, crawlspaces and basements are other locations that are more prone to freezing. Remember, open windows or doors can allow persistent drafts to freeze portions of pipes, leading to blockages.

To prevent pipes from freezing, ensure your insulation is sufficient in areas that are more prone to cold temperatures. If you have had trouble in the past with cold air leaks and pipe blockages, ensure that the insulation is upgraded. Make sure you seal or block drafty areas where pipes may be exposed to freezing temperatures. You can also wrap pipes or insulate pipes that could potentially be exposed to freezing temperatures.

It may seem prudent to keep doors closed and keep heat contained in each room of the house, but it is actually advisable to keep doors open for continued air flow, as this will minimize cold spots and help prevent moisture build-up.

PROTECT FROM SEWAGE BACKUP - INSTALL BACKWATER VALVES

When municipal sewage systems cannot handle the inflow of water due to melting snow or heavy rains, water can be sent back into a house through the connected sewer system. This can result in dirty, sewage water flowing back into your home, which requires the involvement of a property restoration team and sophisticated cleaning methods. To avoid this problem, a mainline sewer backup valve should be installed, which allows sewage to flow only one way – out – of your house.

Be careful not to pour oil and grease down drains, as these will cause build-up in pipes. Toilet drainage systems can develop blockages from non-organic waste, including baby wipes, sanitary towels and excesses of multi-ply toilet paper. Additionally, ensure there are no leaves or debris blocking the municipal sewer drain. When pipes are not treated well, blockage and sewage back-ups can lead to devastating flooding situations, often in basements or garages.

PRESERVE THE FOUNDATION

Water that collects around your foundation can lead to seepage into your home. It's best to make sure your soil slopes downward, away from your foundation. It may also be a good idea to ensure snow is moved away from the side of your home to minimize melting near your foundation. Inspect your interior and exterior foundation walls for any visible damage or cracks. When water enters cracks and freezes, the freeze/thaw cycle can actually contribute to bigger cracks and more water infiltration. If the moisture from ice and snow seeps into your house, it can also result in damaged insulation and drywall, and perhaps mold and mildew problems.

PREVENT FIRE DAMAGE

TAKE CARE OF YOUR FURNACE

It's a good idea to test your furnace before the cold weather settles in. Make sure that you turn it on before you need it to ensure it's working properly. For the best efficiency, replace air filters on a regular basis; having old or insufficient filters can increase energy costs. It's a good idea to inspect your ducts for gaps or damage that can result in wasted heat. You should clean your air vents with a damp cloth and check for blockages. Also, make sure gas lines are checked for any leakages. For peace of mind, call a service provider to conduct preventative maintenance checks on your HVAC system.

FUNCTIONING ALARMS

Check to see that your alarms are working. When windows and doors are tightly closed, the risk of carbon monoxide grows. Replace batteries in all smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. If they contain filters, replace those as well.

CHIMNEY & FIREPLACE INSPECTION

It's very important that chimneys and fireplaces be inspected annually, before use for the season. Since chimneys are only used in winter, their downtime can lead to build-up of dirt and debris that can affect both the safety and the structural integrity of this channel. Often a chimney can become blocked without a homeowner realizing; birds nests are common types of blockages. In gas lines, spider webs can cause blockages and fire hazards. In wood burning fireplaces, creosote – a residue from the burn – can build up in the chimney and is highly combustible. A professional cleaning will ensure you can operate safely for the season.

CANDLES

Winter fires can happen indoors from any open flames being near flammable items. Consider replacing candles with flashlights and fresh batteries.

WOOD FIRES

Season a new load of wood before you start your winter fires. Be sure to move any rotting wood away from your home and avoid using it in your fireplace. Rotting wood tends to be wet from the inside and burning it will contribute to a build-up of creosote in the chimney. Avoid stacking wood against your home, as it can attract insects and rodents.

OTHER PROPERTY TO PROTECT

GARDENING TOOLS

Strong winds, ice and hailstorms can knock over and destroy property. Gardening tools such as lawn mowers, shears, or rakes will rust and deteriorate through the winter, but can also cause damage if they get caught up in strong winds. Be sure to put these in a locked shed, garage or basement where they will be safe from weather effects.

PATIO FURNITURE, BARBECUES, & POOL ACCESSORIES

Patio furniture, pool accessories and large umbrellas can also be blown away by strong winds. They can also collect ice and excess water as snow starts to thaw. Be sure to store these items indoors through the duration of the winter to preserve them and to keep people safe. Move barbecues and grills indoors or cover them with a weather-proof tarp.

ONCE WINTER WEATHER HITS

When winter storms roll in, if you've followed the preventative measures and maintenance steps above, your house will be better situated to withstand the harsh conditions winter can throw at it. But when winter weather does land at your door, there are other precautions to take to ensure your home does not get damaged from the elements.

1

CLEAR THE SNOW

Clear all entrances of ice and snow as regularly as possible. Place sand, salt, and shovels in an accessible area so you can easily clear pathways affected by snow and ice. Laying sand or salt along steps and walkways will help melt snow piles and prevent the development of slippery ice patches. If large spaces need clearing, hire a snow removal service to clear porches, walkways and driveways covered by large snow piles, as these can turn into solid ice.

2

MONITOR SNOW LOAD ON ROOFS

Excessive snow load, depending on the design and age of your home or garage, could present a structural risk. Heavy snow and ice loads can cause roofs to collapse if the structure is not built to current standards. When rain falls on accumulated snow, the weight will increase. The pitch of the roof is also a factor; flat roofs are more likely to require manual snow removal than roofs with a steep pitch. On flat roof surfaces the snow cannot slide off on its own and will continue to accumulate throughout the winter.

Clearing snow can be risky and should only be done if necessary. Monitor the snow load and if deemed necessary to clear, it is advised to hire a professional. Do not go onto the roof yourself without safety equipment including harnesses and a spotter. People can easily fall to their death when working on a roof without proper equipment. Snow rakes with long adjustable poles can be helpful in pulling down snow from ground level. Certainly, icicles should be removed from the house, especially around paths and entry areas so they do not fall and hurt anyone.

3

AVOID WATER INFILTRATION

Additionally, thawing snow that collects around the foundation can seep indoors and cause flooding or contribute to mold and mildew growth. Remove snow piles close to the property to protect the foundation. Check that downspouts are pointed away from the building.



EMERGENCY PREPARATION IN WINTER

With the unpredictability of winter weather, property damage can happen quickly. Protect your home before and during the winter season.

In case of an emergency, have your contact list ready to call for assistance:

- **EMERGENCY SERVICES: FIRE, AMBULATORY AND POLICE**
- **YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY OR BROKER**
- **YOUR TRUSTED PROPERTY RESTORATION PARTNER**

GET IN TOUCH WITH FIRST ONSITE

We are FIRST ONSITE, and we are here to help power you through whatever disaster comes your way. We are a leading North American property restoration company that specializes in emergency response restoration and reconstruction following disasters of any kind. From severe winter weather damage to fires and floods, from catastrophic storms to biohazards, we have the team, technology and resources to help you **Restore, Rebuild, and Rise.**

FIRST ONSITE is here to help you get through the winter season.

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