

In this Issue ...

- + Winterizing Your Home
- + Holiday Lighting & Decorations
- + Homeowner Holiday Surprise

Welcome to our Newsletter

Home maintenance can be timely, costly, and confusing. Many first time homeowners are completely unaware of the multitude of tasks and projects that come along with homeownership. Likewise, others who have owned their own home for years have often have questions about how to best maintain their home to ensure its upkeep and, in turn, its value. After all, the goal of ownership is ultimately the same for most homeowners - to keep a home in the hopes of passing it along to future generations, to have a safe and happy environment to raise a family, as an investment, or simply to have a place to call "Home". Sometimes a home is purchased for a combination of these reasons. For all of these reasons, upkeep and maintenance is imperative for success.

Many of you reading this are current customers of A Cut Above Carpentry and are, therefore, aware of what it is that we do. However, for those of you who are not customers, we welcome you to visit our website (www.ACutAboveCarpentry.com) where you will find photos of completed projects, customer reviews, and more. Our Face Book page (www.Facebook.com/ACutAboveCarpentryMD) also contains helpful hints and additional photos.

A Cut Above Carpentry is a full service, family owned and operated, home improvement company. We offer a wide variety of repairs from the smallest repair to full remodeling.

It is with our customers in mind that we have begun this newsletter to offer helpful hints, advice, and suggestions to assist homeowners with maintaining their homes. While skill and experience vary, this newsletter will attempt to helpful hints and maintenance tips that will, hopefully, prevent the need for emergency repairs and service.

Homeowner Q&A

We are pleased to offer you, the homeowner, the opportunity to submit general questions that you may have about your home's upkeep. Common questions (and answers) will be published in upcoming newsletters to help others who may have the same concerns, issues, and questions. Please submit your questions, via email, to ACutAbove.office@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Happy Holidays!



101 Irene Way
Smithsburg, Maryland 21783

Phone (301) 824-7151

Fax (301) 824-7159

Email ACutAbove.Office@gmail.com

Web www.ACutAboveCarpentry.com

Winterization Tasks for Professionals

Homeowner's skill levels can vary. We recommend leaving the following tasks to the professionals:

- **Chimney Sweep** - Thousands of fires each winter originate in chimneys. Chimneys do not need to be swept annually, although, a chimney should ***at least be inspected*** before use each year to ensure there are no visitors, creosote buildup, large amounts of debris, and/or structural damage.
- **Furnace Tune-Up** – First, turn your furnace on BEFORE you need it, to make sure it's working. (A strong, short-lasting smell is natural when firing up the furnace in the autumn; simply open windows to dissipate it). If the smell lasts a long time, shut down the furnace and call a professional. If it appears to be working properly, have an HVAC professional perform an inspection and a tune-up. Keeping your furnace clean, properly maintained, and properly adjusted may reduce energy use, saving up to 5% of heating costs.
- **Duct Sealing** - According to the U.S. Department of Energy, a home with central heating can lose up to 60% of its heated air before reaching the vents if ductwork is not connected, or if it must travel through unheated spaces. Studies show 10% - 30% of heated air can escape from ducts. Ducts can often be exposed in attics, basements, and crawlspaces. Consult a professional to repair pinched pipes, which may impede the flow of heated air to the house, and to repair or seal gaps. Properly sealing ducts can save the average home up to \$140 annually, according to the American Solar Energy Society. Plus, you'll have better protection against mold and dust.



Winterizing Your Home

Winterization?! For new homeowners winterization is a responsibility that was not planned for when considering the costs of home ownership. However, it may come as a surprise that those who have owned their homes for years may also be unsure as to what exactly this task entails.

Certainly the tasks included in winterization will vary based upon geographic location. As a contractor in the Mid-Atlantic area, we are most definitely aware of the need to winterize a home. Many can relate to the [Department of Energy](#) statistic that making your home more airtight and efficient can save you up to 25 percent on utility bills.

Most of you may have already completed several of these steps, and some of you have already taken care of all of them... If you're one of the few who has already winterized your home, Kudos!

Unfortunately, many of us, cannot find enough hours in the day to take care of everything. Therefore, if you find even one task below that you have not yet tackled, it's not too late to do so. Often we find an above freezing day, in late fall/early winter, which allows us to take care of those items which we had every intention of doing, *prior* to the temperatures plummeting. While there are additional items that should be tended to we have compiled a basic list that will get you started in the right direction.

~ **Reverse Your Ceiling Fans** Reversing your ceiling fan is a fall & spring tip that people often overlook. By reversing its direction from the summer operation, the fan will push warm air downward and force it to re-circulate, keeping the room warmer. (To determine the proper direction for winter & summer, look up at the fan when it's in motion – clockwise is for comfort (warmth), counter clockwise is for cooling. In the winter mode, warm air pooled near the ceiling is circulated back into the living space which can reduce your heating costs by as much as 10%! (*Don't forget to make the switch again in the spring when it starts to warm up*).

Lighting Safety

Many are surprised to find that Christmas lights **do not** make up the bulk of "festive lighting" purchases. In recent years manufacturers have created lights for all seasons, and all reasons. Lights are available for Valentine's Day, July 4th parties, and more; intricate strands of lights can certainly brighten a dorm room, lights now come in all shapes and sizes.

Line-voltage holiday or decorative lights start an average of 170 home structure fires each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association. LED lights pose the least fire hazard, but also cost a little more for that peace of mind, and their longevity.

- Only use lights tested and rated by Underwriters Laboratories (look for the UL label).
- Follow manufacturer guidelines, including use in the proper environment (indoor vs. outdoor).
- Check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, and loose connections. Discard any damaged light sets.
- Use no more than three standard size light sets per single extension cord.
- Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping, but do not run cords under rugs.
- Be careful when hanging lights. Use insulated holders instead of tacks, staples or nails.
- Avoid hanging lights near any potential fire hazard, such as loose paper or other flammable materials.
- Turn off all lights before you go to bed or leave the house

~ **Change Furnace Filters** Yes it's easy to forget, but it's important to replace or clean furnace filters once a month during the heating season. Dirty filters restrict airflow and increase energy demand. Try making a monthly note on your calendar or a reminder in your smartphone. Did you know that disposable fiberglass filters trap a measly 10 to 40% of debris? Electrostatic filters are more expensive (typically \$30 - \$75), but they will trap around 88%, and are much better at controlling the bacteria, mold, viruses and pollen that cause illness and irritation. Another good choice is a genuine HEPA filter, which can remove at least 99.97% of airborne particles. HEPA filters are based on Department of Energy standards. But avoid "HEPA-like" filters, which can be vastly less effective. Used, dirty fiberglass filters may be disposed of and replaced; electrostatic filters may be washed & reused.

~ **Clean those gutters** Once the leaves fall, remove them and other debris from your home's gutters -- by hand, with a blower, by scraper or spatula, and finally by a good hose rinse to allow the winter's rain and melting snow to properly drain. Clogged drains can form ice dams, in which water backs up, freezes and causes water to seep into the house, according to the Insurance Information Institute. As you're hosing out your gutters, look for leaks and misalignment. Also, make sure the downspouts are carrying water away from the house's foundation; water draining at the foundation may cause flooding, deterioration, and/or other water damage.

~ **Trim nearby trees** If you have any tree branches hanging near your roof, windows, or driveways, trim them back. Snow and ice may weigh them down and possibly cause them to break. Homeowner's can easily prevented any damage or misfortune by making time, or having a professional, trim encroaching trees.

~ **Winterize Your A/C and Water Lines** Turn off all exterior spigots, remove any hoses, ensure they are completely drained, and stow them away neatly until next spring. Turn off interior supply to outside water spigots (then re-open the exterior spigots to completely drain the system). Be sure to close them once they've fully drained to prevent cold air seeping in from outside. Taking a few steps to protect your A/C during the winter can extend the life of your unit. Winterizing your A/C is fairly simple; drain any pipes or hoses coming from your outside unit to prevent freezing. If your a/c has a water shutoff valve, go ahead and turn that off and vacuum out any pools of water remaining in the drain pan. You may also cover the central air unit with an air conditioner cover. The cover will keep water and snow out of the unit and will minimize rusting. Remove any window A/C units from windows to prevent drafts and to allow for more efficient heating of your home.



~ Turn down Your Water Heater Like the furnace or boiler, your hot water tank should be checked before you go into winter, but in this case you can do it yourself. If the thermostat is set at more than 120 degrees, the safety point that can keep children and the elderly from being scalded, turn it down. While many conventional water heaters are set to 140 degrees F, most households don't need that much steam, and may end up paying for it, in dollars and the occasional scalding burn. A higher temperature setting on the hot water heater allows you to find the preferred shower temperature by mixing overly hot water with cold. By setting the hot water heater so it comes out at the right temperature, you'll find a perfect temperature more efficiently. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, this simple fix can save you from 6 percent to 10 percent on your water-heating costs.

Purchasing a "blanket" to put around the hot water tank *is not* a good return on investment unless your tank is more than 12-15 years old. Newer Energy Star heaters have better insulation and do not typically require a "blanket". The typical rule of thumb is as follows: if the water heater feels warm when placing your hand on the outside of the tank, adding a water heater blanket may improve efficiency. **Use Caution around pipes at the hot water heater; they may be HOT!**

~ Dodge the Draft(s) According to the U.S. Department of Energy, drafts can waste 5% to 30% of your energy use. As small as ¼-inch or even ⅛-inch gap is the equivalent of a 2-inch hole in your wall! Bear in mind, drafts located near thermostats can cause faulty readings driving your heating costs up. Start simple, adopt that old Great Depression fixture, the draft snake, which you can easily make yourself by placing a rolled bath towel under a drafty door. Common locations for drafts are around electrical outlets and switches on exterior walls. This can be resolved easily and inexpensively. Pre-cut foam gaskets may be purchased at home improvement stores, for less than a dollar a piece. If you are handy, simply remove the outlet/switch-plate screws, place the foam gasket over the outlet or switch, and reinstall the switch plate. Finally, drafts at windows and doors may be sealed with caulk and weather-stripping.

~ Mind That Thermostat It's easy to forget to turn down the heat when you leave the building, but doing so is one of the surest ways to save money. Most households shell out 50 to 70% of their energy budgets on heating and cooling, so why pay for what no one uses? For every degree you lower the thermostat during heating season, you'll save bet bill. Make it easier with a programmable thermostat; they are widely available for as little as \$50.00, and the average family will save \$180.00 with a mid-grade, programmable thermostat.

~ Put on a Sweater Make like Jimmy Carter and dress warmer for winter, even inside. Remember what we said about each degree on the thermostat costing you money? Roughly speaking, a light long-sleeved sweater is worth about 2 degrees in added warmth, while a heavy sweater (even the ugliest of ugly sweaters) adds about 4 degrees. So cozy up and start saving.

~ Prepare a 72 hour kit Most of us who have lived in the mid-Atlantic are all too familiar with snow storms that can shut down the city, and the roads. A small investment which will make you much more comfortable in this situation would be a 72-hour kit stocked with food, water, and other supplies. You can buy pre-made 72-hour kits online or at most camping and outdoor stores. Better yet, save some money by making your own 72-hour kit. Don't forget plenty of firewood, batteries, & flashlights just in case of a power outage.

A Cut Above
CARPENTRY
www.ACutAboveCarpentry.com
Phone (301) 824 - 7151

Expiration Date: 31 January 2015

Authorization: _____

MHIC# 100095 / PA# 073540

\$25 Dollars

Coupon may only be used on jobs exceeding \$100.00. One coupon per household, per invoice.
Coupon may not be used in conjunction with other discounts (except for seniors, or first responders).
Coupon may not be used in combination with other offers or promotions.

Please present coupon, prior to invoicing, for office approval. Photocopies may not be accepted without prior approval.

Code: NWL1-1