ALL AROUND THE HOUSE

A compilation of Homeowner Tips as originally published in the Great Island Monthly Newsletters
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Winterize Your Home

Winter has arrived!! Here are only a handful of suggestions to help winterize your home:

- Have your lawn sprinkler system professionally turned off and drained to prevent damage to your plastic underground water pipes and sprinkler heads from frozen water.

- Turn off your outside water hose faucet using the inside inline shutoff valve, allow any standing water to drain by opening that faucet; then close the faucet valve and cover with outdoor foam faucet cap to provide additional protection from freezing temperatures.

- Remove hoses from the outdoor faucets and drain them from standing water and store them inside.

- Install your glass storm door, if applicable.

- Change house furnace and humidifier filter as per manufacturer’s instructions and move the humidifier lever to “winter position”, if applicable.

- Cover the top of the outdoor air condition compressor to protect the fan blades from ice and snow damage.

- Take in or tie down deck furniture to protect them from winter gusty winds.

- Remove any extraneous items from your outdoor steps and walkway to facilitate snow removal.

- Have appropriate ice melt product available to address icy conditions on steps and walkways as “rock salt” has permanent damaging effects on concrete surfaces.

- Consider placing orange snow sticks along driveway and walkway to facilitate snow removal.

- Remember not to leave an idling car in your garage because of carbon monoxide buildup entering your home.
New Year Safety Tips

With the arrival of the New Year, here are a handful of safety tip suggestions:

1. Replace flashlight batteries in house and car flashlights on a yearly basis before they die, leak and damage your flashlight.

2. Replace batteries in house smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on a yearly basis to ensure they operate in case of a blackout.

3. Replace batteries in portable AM/FM radios to ensure they operate during a blackout.

4. To minimize the risk of fire, it is not advisable to recharge a laptop computer on combustible materials such as on a sofa or a bed, etc.

5. Use of a portable plug-in electric light timer in a living room table lamp provides the ability to retire to the bedroom and have the living room light turn off automatically after you are in bed. It also provides additional personal safety and security for a resident when returning home in dark evening hours so they don’t enter a completely dark house.

6. The use of installed lighted bathroom wall switches and plug-in nightlights assists in the safety of residents and guests when entering a dark bathroom.

7. Thermostat batteries should be replaced on a yearly basis to ensure that the heating and air conditioning system works properly.

8. Keep a first aid kit handy and accessible in house and automobile.

9. And don’t forget to always keep some extra fresh batteries on hand. Alkaline batteries generally last a bit longer and don’t leak when compared to less expensive zinc carbon batteries. If you rechargeable batteries, make sure to recharge them as needed to maintain a full charge.
Cold weather has arrived!! Here is a suggestion to help keep your home safe:

Have you been noticing that your clothes dryer is taking longer to dry your clothes than it used to? Did you know that your clothes dryer can be a cause of a home fire? In the normal clothes dryer drying process, lint from your clothes can accumulate inside your dryer and in the dryer’s vent ductwork. This excessive lint buildup effectively blocks the clothes dryer’s warm exhaust air from properly venting to the outside of your home which in turn, forces your dryer to work harder and ultimately lengthens the drying time to dry your clothes.

More importantly, excessive clothes lint is highly combustible and under the right conditions, it can cause a house fire. Unfortunately, most people think that if they just clean the clothes dryer’s interior lint filter they should be fine but in reality that is not the case. Over the years, excessive lint can build up inside the dryer’s ductwork and in many cases, this lint is clearly visible on the dryer’s ductwork vent flaps on the side of your house. Lifting up the vent flaps and looking inside the dryer’s vent ductwork with a flashlight will provide a visual indication as to the amount of lint buildup in your dryer’s ductwork. The “as needed cleaning” of this dryer ductwork by either the homeowner or by a professional will help to minimize a dryer lint fire in your home.

Another dryer safety tip is to never leave your dryer on when you leave your home as a dryer lint fire could start and go on undetected for a period of time when you not at home. And while you are cleaning, you may also want to vacuum the bathroom exhaust ceiling fans as they can accumulate a buildup of household dust over a period of time which can negatively affect its venting performance.
Here is a suggestion to help keep your home safe from a water heater flood!

Just like any household appliance, your home’s water heater also has an expected useful service life. Nobody wants to take a cold shower or have to clean up a flooded basement. So the question is, “when is the right time to replace your water heater”? Just because your water heater may have a neat and clean exterior appearance that “looks good” doesn’t mean all is good inside as looks can be very deceiving.

Many of the standard tank-type water heaters that were originally installed in new homes came with the traditional 6 year manufacturer’s warranty. So what does this mean? The water heater manufacturer designed and used materials in their water heater so it would perform properly within their limited warranty period. However, there are a number of external factors that can and do impact on the overall life of a tank-type water heater. Such factors include: the quality of the incoming water, overall usage of the unit, the manufacturer’s brand and model, quality of installation and level of preventative maintenance your water heater has received over its life. The one thing that is almost certain is that as a water heater gets older, the more likely to is going to unexpectedly fail. It is only a matter of time before it starts leaking and needs to be replaced.

The first question is, “Do you want to be in control of your water heater situation in order to avoid a flood resulting in water damage to your finished basement which could translate into a costly clean up and related health/mold condition”? As we all know about the roll of the dice when it comes to your water heater, it will traditionally fail at the most inopportune time; late at night, on a holiday weekend, when plumbers and plumbing supply houses are closed, when you have a house full of guests over for dinner, or when you are away on vacation.

When replacing your water heater, there are two important decisions you should consider. First, you can increase the traditional 6 year warranty on your new water heater to 10 years by purchasing the optional extended anode rod kit that your plumber can provide and install. Secondly, you can purchase a separate, optional automatic flood protection device that your plumber can provide and install that provides 24/7 water protection. This device immediately shuts off the incoming cold water to your water heater should there be premature water leak from your water heater. This device is “cheap insurance” to protect your home from water heater flood damage.

So think about this:

Is the original water heater in your house more than 6 years old and do you want to be pro-active or reactive in taking action to replace your tank-type water heater? By being pro-active, you can replace your water heater on your schedule thereby avoiding an expensive emergency plumbing service call and related water/mold damage expenses while minimizing the stress and anxiety in cleaning up all of that flood mess.
All Around The House Tips for Great Island Homeowners, May 2015

Seasonal Plumbing Tips

The snow and cold temperatures have ended and hopefully spring is finally here, so now is an excellent time to check your home and property for any storm damage. Here are some helpful household maintenance tips.

I have heard that many Great Island residents have experienced the same winter related plumbing problem that I did. Due to the extremely cold temperatures and the heavy weight of the snow and previous exposure to years of harmful sunrays, my outdoor plastic water pipe leading from the house to the underground sprinkler system became brittle and snapped right off in two places. When making this pipe repair, your plumber may suggest using copper pipe instead of plastic to help reduce the chances of a similar pipe failure in the future. You should carefully inspect your outdoor plumbing pipe and connections before turning on the water to your sprinkler system to prevent an unexpected flood condition.

And speaking of plumbing and potential floods, while we all store many items in our basement, it is good idea to have a clear and unobstructed path leading to the incoming water main shut off valve. The water valve should have a reference tag for easy identification as every second counts when you need to locate it and turn off your water supply in an emergency.

And lastly, it is important to run water in all plumbing fixtures every month, especially with infrequently used bathrooms and utility sinks. Every plumbing fixture has its own waste water trap that naturally fills with used water which prevents noxious sewer gas from entering your home. The waste water in these water traps is automatically renewed every time you use that plumbing fixture. However, in guest bathrooms, this waste water can and does evaporate over a period of time which can lead to a foul sewer odor coming from that plumbing fixture. To remedy that situation, simply run some water in your unused sink and bathtub and flush the toilet at the beginning of every month.
All Around the House Tips for Great Island Homeowners, June 2015

Summer Maintenance Tips

Now that summer has arrived, here are some quick and easy tips to help maintain your home.

1. After the hard winter that we had, it is a good idea to vacuum the floor track of your deck’s sliding glass door and screen to remove any dirt and debris that can interfere with its smooth sliding movement. If you find it is difficult to slide it open, then the use of a light application of an aerosol silicone spray on the bottom and top tracks would be helpful. It is suggest to avoid the use of petroleum based oils and lubricants such as WD40 and others as the petroleum sometimes has a negative interaction with certain plastic and rubber based products.

2. While most of us traditionally enter the house through the garage, your front door lock often becomes unused for long periods of time which can cause problems with the lock. Moisture and air borne dirt finds its way into the locking mechanism which can and does “gum up” the internal workings of the lock. Most locksmiths recommend a small amount of powdered graphite in the key hole to provide the necessary lubrication to ensure proper lock operation without leaving behind any negative residue to attract additional moisture or dirt. Powdered graphite comes in a small tube and is available at your local hardware or home improvement center. In a quick fix, you can rub a #1 or #2 grade pencil along your house key to provide a very temporary graphite lubrication to the lock mechanism.

3. If you haven’t already done so, it is time to remove the protective winter cover from your outdoor house air conditioner before turning on your air conditioner system. Clean the protective cover and stow it away in a place you can easily find it for use again this coming winter. Carefully remove any leaves or other debris that could impede air flow to this outdoor unit that would ultimately hinder its operating performance.
Wireless Garage Door Keypad Entry Systems

911…What is your emergency?

When life’s serious emergencies happen, 911 first responders can be a life saver. Now think of this….if you were home alone and became seriously ill or injured and you were able to call 911 for assistance, did you ever think how those first responders would enter your home if you were unable to open your front door for them? In some cases, they may have to break a window or your front door to gain immediate access to your home in order to assist you with your emergency need.

In an emergency, time is of the essence. So precious moments count and they can’t be wasted when first responders need to try to break into your home. Also, think of the physical mess, cost of damage and repair to the window or front door and the fact that your house is now unprotected from entry and weather conditions.

Here is an easy solution. For approximately $40, you can solve this emergency entry situation! By simply installing a wireless garage door keypad, you can give 911 first responders your numeric code to gain immediate access to your house through your garage. This wireless keypad is available at local home improvement stores and is easy to install.

The added convenience of this keypad is the ability to provide a temporary access code to a service provider when you are not at home. This eliminates the need of giving them a house key which can be lost or duplicated. In addition, it is nice to have the convenience of not having to take your house keys with you when you go for a walk or visit a neighbor. Just simply enter your numeric code into your keypad and you have access to your home.

Don’t forget, the next time you need to call 911 in a home emergency situation and you can’t open your front door, give first responders your garage door code to save precious time and minimize entry damage to your home!
Sprinkler Systems

Have you ever woken up in the morning to find that it had rained heavy during the evening and now your lawn sprinkler is on and watering your rain soaked lawn? Or, how about when you are away on vacation and your lawn sprinkler is going full blast during a major downpour?

Well, there is a very simple and effective way to correct this lawn overwatering situation! All you have to do is to install an automatic lawn irrigation rain sensor. This small rain sensor is placed outside your home and when it becomes wet from the rain, it will automatically turn off your sprinkler system. Once the sensor dries out, the system will revert to its pre-programmed mode. This sensor is available from a local irrigation supply store and can be installed by the homeowner or a handyman or you can have your local irrigation service company provide and install one for you.

And speaking of your lawn sprinkler control unit which is located on the wall in your garage, did you know that it can be programmed on many different levels to meet your individual lawn and garden watering needs? You can set it to run on designated individual days of the week or to run on even or odd days. In addition, you can set the individual length of watering time by watering zone to meet your specific requirements; for example, more watering time for the lawn and less time for the flower bed areas. Also, did you know that your control unit has a 9 volt backup battery to maintain your programmed settings in case of a blackout? With this in mind, the battery should be changed every couple years to make sure it is fresh enough to work during a power outage.

By following this suggestion, you will save water, you will save money, and you will protect your lawn from the potential for lawn disease.
Lightning Safety / GFCI Tips

Lightning is a tremendous force of Mother Nature. Many times, it gives us an awesome light show in the sky but it can also prove to be deadly as well as damaging to our homes and electronic devices. Scientists have determined that one lightning bolt has enough electricity to power a small city for several months!

Several weeks ago, we had an early morning thunderstorm in the Plymouth area that did affect some Great Island residents, including our house. A bolt of lightning struck which created an electrical surge that came through our cable television line. It permanently damaged the cable box and some connections on the television. Separate and apart, the house GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) which supplies electrical power to the outdoor post lamp, basement and garage electrical outlets tripped as well. The indicator light turned red when it detected an electrical problem from the lightning strike. This GFCI is located in the basement next to your electrical circuit breaker panel. Some residents have a secondary refrigerator/freezer in a basement or garage that may be powered by this GFCI. Electricians suggest that these appliances not be powered by a GFCI circuit as they can trip easily, resulting in loss of power and spoiled food. An electrician can run a separate dedicated non-GFCI line to provide power to these extra appliances.

Lightning is very unpredictable. You can be pro-active to help protect your home and its electronic equipment from electrical surges. An electrician can install a whole house surge protector in your circuit breaker panel. Many of us use the traditional limited capacity surge protector outlet strip for our computers, but that is not enough. The whole house surge protector is much more sophisticated and has a larger capacity to handle unexpected surges. With this whole house device, you can protect your computers, televisions, microwaves, radios, washer and dryers, etc. There are several different brands of whole house surge protectors available and many of them offer a free insurance plan covering the failure of the device to protect your appliance from an electrical surge.
Fall/Winter Tips

While we still have good weather, now is the time to prepare your home for the upcoming winter season. Here are some helpful tips.

1. Install a new furnace filter now. Also, if your heating system has built-in humidifier, it is a good time to replace the “water pad”. Move the humidifier’s operating season lever from “SUMMER” to “WINTER” mode.

2. You can easily remove your floor heating vents and vacuum the interior ductwork to remove standing dust and any debris that may have accumulated.

3. Clean out your entire clothes dryer vent system to increase the operational efficiency of your clothes dryer and minimize the potential condition for a lint fire in your home.

4. If you have the black rubber hoses that came with your washing machine, you should replace them since they have an average life expectancy of approximately 7 years. As these rubber hoses age with time and usage, they become very brittle and can burst without warning. This can happen whether the machine is in use or not thereby causing a major flood in your home. These hoses should be replaced with the newer style, braided stainless steel flexible hoses. When you are not using your washing machine, it is a good practice to turn off the wall mounted hose lever, if accessible, in order to remove water pressure from the hoses thereby minimizing an additional flood potential.

5. If your original driveway has never been seal coated, you might want to consider having it done now before winter arrives. By doing so, you will seal all of the cracks where water can enter and freeze thus undermining surface of the driveway. Proper preventative maintenance will extend the life of your driveway.

Part II next month!!!!!
Fall Is Here Winter Can’t Be Far Behind Part II

Fall / Winter Tips

While we still have good weather, now is the time to prepare your home for the upcoming winter season. Here are some additional helpful tips.

1. Make sure your lawn irrigation service provider has winterized your sprinkler system and installed a new 9 volt backup battery in the garage control unit to retain your sprinkler time/day schedule.

2. Remove and take inside any garden hoses and drain them to remove any standing water that may freeze and crack your hoses in the winter.

3. Inside the basement, turn off the water supply to your outdoor hose faucets and then go outside to open those faucets to drain any remaining water from the water line.

4. Inspect and replace any damaged weather stripping under the front door and interior house garage door to prevent cold winter winds from entering your home.

5. During the winter season, keep your deck screen door in the “open” position. If left in the normally “closed” position, ice and snow could freeze in the tracks and prevent you from opening the screen door, especially in an emergency.

6. Install the glass panel into your screen/storm door to provide an extra thermal barrier for your front door that helps to keep your house warmer.

7. After the last lawn mowing of the season and before the ground freezes, install orange snow stakes along your driveway and walkway to help outline these areas when snow arrives. Remove all extraneous items from your steps and walkway to help facilitate snow removal.

8. Take in deck furniture or securely tie it down in place to prevent damage from winter winds.

9. Cover the top and 1/3 the area going down on your outside air conditioner unit to prevent ice and snow damage to the unit’s rotating fan blades. The remaining 2/3 of the bottom section of the A/C unit should remain uncovered. This will allow the natural air flow to pass through it to minimize trapped moisture. In addition, it helps to discourage the winter nesting of small animals which can cause costly damage to your A/C unit.

10. Buy your snow supplies and shovels now before the first snow storm! Remember, do not use rock salt on your concrete steps as it will cause permanent damage. Use only “concrete safe” ice melt products on this surface.

11. Change the battery in your living room thermostat on a yearly basis. If the battery dies, your heater will not work and temperatures in your home can drop to near freezing. Additionally, water pipes are subject to damage especially for “snow bird” residences.

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Smoke, Heat, and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide detectors are critical 24/7 life-saving devices found in each of our homes. Traditionally, many of us forget about them until these devices make themselves known to us either by sounding a loud warning siren or signaling a soft periodic chirp, all of which usually happens at the most inopportune time. The audible signal warnings from these safety devices should be taken seriously and immediately investigated to determine the cause of the alarm.

Great Island homes were built using a “hard-wired” smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide detector system as required by Massachusetts’ law. “Hard-wired” means that all of these detectors are powered by the home’s standard 120 volt electrical system and they contain a battery backup feature to provide uninterrupted protection during an electrical blackout. In order to maintain the integrity of this important battery backup feature, you need to replace the battery in each of these devices on a yearly basis. Fortunately, there is a device failsafe system in the detector which sounds a periodic chirp when the battery is too weak to operate properly and needs to be replaced.

The other life-saving operating feature of a “hard-wired” detector system is that all of the detectors are electrically interconnected to work together as one operating system. This interconnected feature means that when one of these individual devices detects a smoke, heat, and or a carbon monoxide condition, it will simultaneously activate all of the remaining devices.

If your home is over 10 years old, safety experts recommend and Massachusetts’ law requires that your smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors be replaced with new devices. Here is quick recap of the type and where these “hard-wired” safety warning devices are required in your home.

1. “Photoelectric” type smoke detectors must be used within 20’ of the kitchen or bathroom. Note: “Ionization” type smoke detectors use radiation to detect smoke and they have a higher risk of nuisance alarms caused by steam or cooking smoke.

2. Outside of each bedroom, there must be a carbon monoxide detector and inside the bedroom, there must be a smoke detector.

3. A carbon monoxide detector is required on each floor of your home, including the basement.

4. Heat detectors (not smoke detectors) are required in the garage.

5. Smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide detectors are available as individual units and new technology has now provided us with a combination of smoke and carbon monoxide safety devices in one unit with an audio speaking feature. For more detailed information, you can view this online by copying and pasting the Internet link below into your search engine:

Garbage Disposals

Thinking wisely today about how you use your kitchen garbage disposal will help prevent future costly plumbing problems!

Many homeowners reply heavily on their kitchen garbage disposal on a daily basis. However, the misuse of your disposal can damage the unit itself and could ultimately clog your drain pipes resulting in costly plumbing repairs and drain cleaning services. Here is an abbreviated list of the Do’s and Don’ts when using your kitchen garbage disposal based on the advice from various industry and plumbing experts.

The Do’s:

- Do keep your garbage disposal clean and operating efficiently by occasionally grinding some ice cubes to knock off any food residue that may have built up on the grinding blades and on the inside walls of the unit.
- Do make sure to cut large food waste items into smaller pieces before placing them slowly, one at a time, into the disposal as not to jam the unit.
- Do make sure that you run COLD water before turning on your disposal unit. Continue running the cold water in your disposal for several seconds after the last food item has been fully ground up in order to clear and flush the drain line from any remaining food waste residue.
- Do use COLD water continuously when grinding food waste. Cold water helps to solidify greasy food waste to reduce the chances of it sticking to the disposal unit and plumbing pipes. The use of hot water will quickly cool and the grease could congeal on horizontal pipes and potentially cause a plumbing blockage.
- Do grind peelings from citrus fruits to freshen up any objectionable disposal odors.
The Don’ts:

- Do not use your garbage disposal as a garbage can. Items to avoid using in your disposal:

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- Do not put any non-biodegradable items such as cigarette butts, sponges, and plastic items, etc. into the kitchen garbage disposal.

- Do not pour oils, grease or fats into the disposal as a blockage can occur along with an unpleasant decaying and fermenting odor. Some experts also suggest avoiding putting coffee grounds in your disposal unit. While the grounds may help to eliminate some disposal odors, in the long run, they might accumulate in your drain pipes causing them to drain slowly or even clog up.

Always follow your kitchen garbage disposal manufacturer’s instructions to properly use and maintain your unit and to minimize the operating conditions that could void your unit’s warranty.

Remember, when in doubt, throw it out! The kitchen garbage disposal is not a substitute for your kitchen trash can. If you decide to use your kitchen garbage disposal, use it wisely!
Gas Fireplaces

Your living room fireplace brings added warmth, ambience and value to your home. Even though your natural gas fireplace has an electric wall switch to turn it on and off, did you know that it still can be operated during a blackout? Yes, it can provide you with localized heat and light during a cold winter night when you have lost electricity and your house furnace will not operate in a blackout.

In the Great Island community, we are fortunate, in many ways, to have a natural gas fireplace as a standard house amenity. When compared to a traditional wood burning fireplace, a natural gas fireplace burns clean without any residual wood ash, has no back draft smoke odor and you don’t need to buy and store any costly seasoned wood to operate it. Also, a natural gas fireplace is very reliable and requires very minimal maintenance.

In order to operate, all natural gas fireplaces need an ignition source to light the main flame. Natural gas fireplaces generally operate in one of two ways and that depends on the type/brand that was originally installed in your home. One type uses a constant burning pilot light ignitor and the other type is a battery operated electronic ignitor.

If you have a fireplace with a pilot light, fireplace professionals suggest that you keep your fireplace pilot light “on/lit” year round. By doing so, the small pilot light flame will help keep moisture and dirt from clogging the very tiny flame ports in your fireplace pipes. and the natural gas cost is minimal. While the cost of natural gas is minimal, still, some homeowners believe they can save money in the summertime by turning off the gas to the pilot light. However, fireplace experts feel otherwise, as demonstrated when an expensive service call is needed to repair your fireplace.

If your fireplace uses an electronic ignitor as its ignition source, make sure to check the unit’s batteries by periodically turning on the fireplace during the year. It is important to have extra replacement batteries of the same size available for your fireplace, especially during the winter season in case of a blackout.

Also, make sure to check your fireplace owner’s manual and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for proper operation. If you have misplaced your manual, most manufacturer’s offer them online free of charge.
Refrigerators

The refrigerator is the most expensive and most frequently used appliance in your kitchen. Unfortunately, we tend to forget about it until it fails to operate properly. Your refrigerator operates 24/7 non-stop throughout the year and it is one of the most energy consuming appliances in your home. While your refrigerator has an estimated 12-15 year life span, you still have the ability to help lower your energy cost and extend its life and operating efficiency through some easy and basic preventative maintenance activities.

Refrigerator door gaskets are one of the most important items in maintaining the efficiency of your appliance. Over a period of time, these door gaskets can lose their ability to properly seal through the repeated opening and closing of the doors. In addition, grease, dirt and mildew on the door gaskets can cause the refrigerator to lose cold air even when the doors are closed. A quick visual inspection and cleaning of the gaskets with a soft sponge and water/dish detergent solution will help to address that issue. Any cracked gaskets and/or weak embedded door gasket magnets (if so equipped) should be replaced. Many repair technicians use the “dollar bill” test to examine the integrity of the door gaskets by putting a dollar bill in the refrigerator door so half of it is inside the refrigerator and the other half is exposed. If the bill slips out easily on its own, it would indicate that you have a weak and leaky door gasket.

On a semi-annual basis, it is important to gently vacuum the condenser coils at the back of the refrigerator as well as the coils behind the front grill at the bottom of the appliance. These coils generally accumulate large amounts of dust and pet hair which causes the refrigerator to overheat and work harder thereby increasing energy cost and shortening the life of the compressor motor. When moving the refrigerator, be careful not to damage the semi-flexible waterline for the icemaker/water dispenser, if so equipped. Over time, the original thin plastic waterline can age and crack from the heat of the refrigerator’s compressor motor. Without any notice, especially when you are not at home, this compromised waterline can cause a major water leak that can result in a flood and thousands of dollars in water and mold damage to your kitchen floor and walls as well as the basement areas below. Ideally, your refrigerator’s waterline should either be either flexible copper tubing or a flexible stainless steel braided hose to help minimize this water leak potential.

Appliance experts recommend that you empty your ice bin on a monthly basis to prevent ice blocks from forming in the bin. Also, the ice can absorb undesirable freezer odors which can affect the taste of your beverages. To help keep your refrigerator/freezer smelling fresh, use an open container of baking soda and/or a new piece of charcoal briquette inside the refrigerator and freezer to absorb these odors. Remember to change your refrigerator’s water filter as needed according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Also, turn off your ice maker to protect it from damage when you turn off your house water for vacation periods.
Lastly, a full refrigerator uses less energy than a semi-empty one. Make sure to leave space at the back of each of your refrigerator shelves so cold air can properly circulate around food items and that those items don’t accidently freeze by touching the back wall. Most refrigerator manufacturers recommend temperature settings of 37 degrees for the refrigerator and 0 degrees for the freezer. Always check your owner’s manual and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for your specific refrigerator/freezer model.
Now that spring is just around the corner, you will be spending more time outdoors and that probably means more frequent use of your garage.

We are very fortunate to have a two car garage amenity as part of our house. As with any large storage space, proper planning, organization and periodic garage preventative maintenance will yield great benefits for you.

Consider installing wire rack shelving in your garage to keep gardening, automotive and winter related items conveniently stored and easily accessible. By doing so, it will keep these items off the floor, dry and away from the rain and snow residue that your car tracks into the garage. Also, it helps to keep your garage floor free from trip and fall potential situations. Use large “C” screw storage hooks on the garage walls to store beach chairs, umbrellas and garden hoses so these items don’t fall onto the floor and against your cars. Garage ceiling cargo devices are designed to provide you with additional storage space by hanging seasonal items such as kayaks and bicycles up and out of the way when they are not needed.

Installing inexpensive foam pool noodles on the garage walls will protect your car doors from hitting the garage walls. Also, consider installing a tennis ball on a string from the ceiling to gently touch your windshield to indicate where to stop in your garage so the vehicle can properly clear the closing door. Airports use this same tennis ball method to safely park aircraft at the gate!

For periodic preventative maintenance, wipe down and silicon spray the garage door tracks, door rollers, and door hinges plus the overhead garage door opener “T” bar and chain to ensure smooth operation and minimize noise. Visually inspect your garage door spring(s). A broken spring should be professionally replaced as soon as possible as it stresses and shortens the life of your garage door and its electric door opener.
Spring time is here and now is the time to get your house prepared for spring/summer activities. Since the cold temperatures are gone, it should be safe to turn “on” the individual water valve in your basement that supplies water to your lawn sprinkler system. Also, remember to make sure to move the sprinkler system selector dial knob to the “on” position in the control panel located on the garage wall when you decide to begin your watering season. Make sure the power transformer is plugged into the electrical outlet and install a new 9 volt battery in the bottom section of the control panel to backup and maintain your sprinkler day/time settings in case of a power outage.

You may want to consider installing a reasonably priced lawn sprinkler rain sensor unit to save money and water by automatically turning off your lawn sprinkler system during a rain storm. And speaking of water, install your garden hoses and turn “on” the individual basement water valves to each of the outdoor water faucets.

If you have a front storm door, now would be the time to remove and clean the storm door glass panel and replace it with the full screen door panel to allow for good fresh air cross ventilation. If your house doesn’t have a storm door, since they were not original to the house, you might want to consider installing one, Great Island DRC (Design Review Committee) approval is required. A storm/screen door will allow for increased house ventilation in the summer and increased natural sunlight coming into your house during the autumn and fall days when the storm door glass is in place.

If you have house ceiling fans, make sure the fan blades are turning in a counter clockwise direction in the summertime and in a clockwise direction in the wintertime to take advantage of natural cooling and heating air movement principles. The proper rotation of the fan blades will enhance either the cooling or heating effect of the standing air in the room moved by the fan blades. The rotational direction of the blades is easily accomplished by moving the small surface mounted electrical slide switch located on the canopy housing of the ceiling fan motor.

Lastly, now is the time to remove the protective winter cover on your outdoor air conditioning compressor. If you forget to remove this cover before using your air conditioning system, it could over heat and damage your compressor unit. Check the exterior sides of your house for winter damage and mold/algae on your siding. Mold/algae naturally occurs on exterior surfaces that are in shady areas, especially on the North side of your home, where there indirect sunlight is.
All Around The House Tips for Great Island Homeowners, June 2016

The grilling season has finally arrived! Here are a couple of quick safety tips to keep in mind when using your outdoor grill.

1. Before lighting your grill at the beginning of the grilling season, carefully inspect your grill for nesting spiders and squirrels that may have taken up a winter residence. Spiders tend to nest in and around the flame ports which can interrupt the natural flow of the propane gas. This blockage can cause the flame to unexpectedly pop and flash back toward you when lighting it, so stand back at an arm’s length. Nesting squirrels have also been known to chew on the flexible rubber propane gas line coming from the tank to the grill. Carefully inspect that gas line for damage at the beginning of each grilling season. Remember to always follow your grill manufacturer’s instructions for the proper use and care of your outdoor grill.

2. Make sure to open and close the propane tank’s valve before and after every grilling event. Do not totally rely on the grill’s cooking valves to properly start and stop the flow of gas as they sometimes can prematurely leak propane gas thereby wasting gas and creating an unsafe condition.

3. Speaking of the grilling flame and temperature, remember to keep your grill at least one foot away from surrounding surfaces such as deck railings and the side of your house. Accidents can and do happen when a hot grill is placed too close to the side of a house where the cooking heat can melt the vinyl siding causing a potential house fire condition.

4. Remember, NEVER keep a grilling propane tank in your garage or basement or near any electrically operated equipment such as your outdoor air conditioning unit. Over time, the propane tank’s valve may not properly seal thereby leaking gas that can unsafely accumulate in your garage or basement creating a potential fire/explosion situation. Always properly store a propane tank either in the grill itself or outside where there is plenty of fresh air ventilation around the tank.

5. A propane tank has an original 12 year service life from the date of manufacture. The manufacturing date is permanently stamped into the valve guard handle area of the tank with two digits for the month and two digits for the year. After 12 years, by law, the tank cannot be refilled with propane gas unless it is recertified by the manufacturer for another 5 years. Also by law, safety practice and common sense, propane tanks cannot be transported by moving companies and they cannot be put out on the driveway for regular garbage or recycling pickup. Expired tanks can sometimes be exchanged at propane exchange retailers located at some gasoline stations or big box retailers where full propane gas tanks are purchased. You can also call the Town of Plymouth for more information on how to safely and properly dispose of your old propane tank.

And don’t forget to remove your outdoor air conditioner cover now and inspect the unit’s wiring before using your whole house air conditioning system. Some homeowners have noticed that their air conditioning unit’s wiring has been damaged by animals during the winter season.
Now that the outdoor warm temperatures of summer have arrived, they bring with it a higher level of humidity moisture in your basement. Increased and concentrated levels of humidity (50% and higher) in your basement can damage your interior walls and lead to mold, mildew, dust mites and bacteria which create unhealthy respiratory living conditions. The resulting dampness in your basement quickly becomes apparent when you smell offensive stale, musty and strong mildew odors. In addition, high levels of humidity dampness in your basement cause metal to rust and corrode; it destroys the integrity of carpets, and it can swell and weaken structural wood beams and furniture.

A portable dehumidifier unit can help remedy and control a humidity moisture problem in your basement. A dehumidifier is designed to pull the damp sticky air into the unit where it condenses the moisture into an internal bucket and redistributes the drier air (dehumidified) back into the basement. Based on the physical size of our home’s basement, a medium capacity (45-50 pints of moisture per day) dehumidifier would generally be appropriate to handle medium to large size living areas. For most basements, the ideal relative humidity level would be between 45-50%.

All dehumidifiers have an internal water bucket to collect the condensate water. When the collection bucket fills up to its capacity, the unit automatically shuts down until you physically empty the water from the dehumidifier which could be as often as once a day. Depending on the model and its operating features, some units have an additional gravity hose drain connection to automatically dispense the condensate water to a floor drain but you have to purchase an inexpensive drain hose separately. More deluxe and expensive models have an internal pump to pump the condensate water further distances up and out of the unit into a sink or outside the house.

Depending on when your house was built, the builder may have configured your basement floor drain in several different ways. Many of us have a 4” hole in the basement concrete floor (near the electrical/telephone panel) that is accessible and is designed to be the discharge point for the condensate water from a portable dehumidifier. Also, based on the model of your home and its physical basement configuration, there may be several other ways to automatically discharge the dehumidifier condensate water so you don’t have to physically empty the dehumidifier bucket on a daily basis.

Over the years, consumers have become energy conscious, and in response, manufacturers are now producing energy efficient consumer appliances identified with the Energy Star® name and logo. To further support these energy saving efforts, Massachusetts residential electric customers are entitled to receive a $30 rebate when they purchase a manufacturer’s dehumidifier that is identified as an Energy Star® designed dehumidifier. The rebate form is online at www.masssave.com and is generally available at point of purchase. Check their website to learn more about other Energy Star® appliance rebates and programs.
Here is additional information regarding the July 2016 house tip regarding dehumidifiers. Unfortunately, as with any electro-mechanical piece of equipment, dehumidifiers can and do breakdown and ultimately fail during their service life. When a dehumidifier fails to produce water in its discharge bucket or hose, it is a sign that the unit is no longer working and it becomes uneconomical to fix. During the dehumidifier season, it is important for the homeowner to visually inspect their dehumidifier to see if it is working properly. Just because you can hear the unit’s fan running, doesn’t mean it is producing water. In the long run, a failed operating dehumidifier costs the homeowner electricity without producing dehumidified air which ultimately increases the potential condition for mold, dust mites, and bacteria to grow in your basement.

Common household batteries

We all have them in our homes and maybe even in the glove box of our automobiles. But have you ever thought how to properly care for and use your common household batteries? Many industry experts suggest the following guidelines to receive the most benefit from your batteries.

1. Always use the recommended type of battery as specified by the manufacturer of your electrical/electronic device. Example: alkaline, lithium ion, rechargeable, etc.

2. Do not mix different types of batteries, do not mix old and new batteries, and do not mix batteries of different brands within a device as this could cause the batteries to leak.

3. Always keep your batteries in their original packaging before you need to use them. Make sure to date your battery package at time of purchase and rotate your inventory to get the most performance out of your batteries. Store them in a dry place at normal household room temperatures. Do not place your batteries in the refrigerator in an effort to increase the battery’s life.

4. Replace all batteries in your device at the same time. Make sure to insert and properly align the plus (+) and minus (-) of the batteries as indicated in the battery compartment of the device.

5. Do not leave batteries in a device if you will not be using that device for several months as the batteries can prematurely leak and cause damage.

6. Do not attempt to recharge non-rechargeable batteries as this may cause them to overheat or leak.

7. Do not put batteries and battery operated devices in very warm places or in direct sunlight for extended periods of time. Extreme temperatures reduce battery performance and may also lead to leakage.

8. Do not place loose batteries together in a storage drawer or in your pocket as they can short circuit against each other causing them to overheat and leak.
9. If your batteries should leak and damage your device, some battery manufacturers offer a satisfaction warranty and will replace the batteries and the device. Carefully check the battery packaging to see if that manufacturer offers this type of warranty.
All Around The House Tips for Great Island Homeowners, September 2016

Home Fire Safety Tips

Home fire safety is paramount in protecting lives and personal property. As a homeowner, in many cases, you have great control in maintaining a safe living environment within your home. Accidental household fires remain a serious threat to homeowners but the good news is that many fires can be prevented through the use of good common sense.

Here are some fire safety tips from the experts:

1. Always maintain, in good working condition, your home’s smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors. Do not remove or disable those life saving devices because they are creating annoying noises. Have an electrician replace any malfunctioning detectors as soon as possible. Unless otherwise recommended by the detector’s published instructions, Massachusetts Fire Code Regulations require that no smoke detectors shall remain in service after 10 years from the date of manufacture. Combination CO (Carbon Monoxide) and smoke detectors may need to be replaced sooner. The manufacturing date is found on the back of each detector. Remember to change the detector’s backup battery on a yearly basis to eliminate the cause of the annoying, periodic beeping/chirping warning sound indicating that the battery is weak and needs to be replaced.

2. Keep combustible materials a safe distance away from an open flame, like a lit candle, or a heat source. Examples include: kitchen stove, toaster, toaster oven, coffee maker, fireplace, house furnace, water heater and portable electric space heaters. If you have a pet, never leave a lit candle unattended.

3. Kitchen fires are a leading cause of house fires. Make sure to turn off the stove top burner when you leave the kitchen or become distracted when answering the telephone.

4. Smoking is the top cause of home fire deaths. Many house fires occur when smoldering butts contact flammable surfaces such as chair cushions and carpeting. Also, smoldering butts should not be discarded in the lawn grass or mulch areas as they cause an outside house fire.

5. Electrical fires are another major source of house fires. Do not use faulty electrical devices in your home. Do not overload electrical power strips and/or light duty electrical extension cords by using heavy duty appliances. Make sure your electrical extension cords are in good working order and do not place them under rugs and carpeting as they can become frayed from constant rubbing when walking on them. Safety experts recommend the purchase of electrical items that bear the UL® (Underwriters Laboratory) label and logo. UL® is a neutral, 3rd party testing organization, that tests and evaluates selected categories of items for product safety. Many non-UL® electrical items (extension cords, electrical power strips, electrical appliances, etc.) fail to meet minimum electrical safety standards and in some cases, have caused serious house fires and electrocutions.
All Around The House Tips for Great Island Homeowners, October, 2016

Stuff, stuff and more stuff….We all have stuff but sometimes there is a need to dispose of our stuff that we no longer want or need. But how do we do that properly and in an environmentally acceptable way?

The Town of Plymouth offers its residents the opportunity to properly dispose of and in some cases, the ability to recycle many items for the good of the environment. The Manomet Transfer Station is located nearby on Beaver Dam Road and is open on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

In order to use this transfer facility, a Plymouth resident must purchase a trash permit from Plymouth Town Hall at 11 Lincoln Street in downtown Plymouth. A 30 day permit will cost $25 and a 4 month permit will cost $75. When purchasing the permit, make sure to bring personal identification and a copy of the vehicle’s registration you plan to use when you bring your items to the transfer station for proof of residency and license plate number. It should be noted that you should not drive into the transfer station unless you have a permit as closed circuit cameras will record your license plate number and you will be issued a $100 fine.

The Manomet Transfer Station will accept many items that would not be normally collected in our regular weekly trash pickup. Such items include: dehumidifiers, air conditioners, refrigerators (plus extra $15 Freon recovery fee), expired propane tanks (plus extra $2.00 fee to extract propane residue), televisions and computer monitors (plus extra $10 for hazardous waste fee). Rechargeable batteries, cell phones and smoke/carbon monoxide detectors, used clothing and textiles, fluorescent light tubes, non-Freon operated appliances, scrap metal including old bar-b-que grills are accepted with no additional fee as long as you have a Plymouth trash permit. For further information, you can contact Sandy Strassel at 508-830-4162 x-100 or via email at: sstrassel@townhall.plymouth.ma.us

Next door and to the right of the Manomet Transfer Station is a privately run Hard to Manage Waste Facility that is open on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. There is a $10.00 minimum fee plus 9.5 cents per pound weight fee and a Plymouth trash permit is not required. This waste facility accepts mattresses, construction and demo debris, cleanouts, bulky items, furniture and carpeting.

Home Depot accepts, free of charge, rechargeable batteries used in cordless tools and fluorescent light tubes as part of their recycling program. Walmart accepts, free of charge, used automobile batteries, automobile anti-freeze and used automobile oil for recycling purposes.

Also, there are a number of charitable thrift stores that accept donations of gently used items for resale in their second hand stores. Such organizations as Savers, Salvation Army, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Habit for Humanity and many others would appreciate your donations and generally give you a tax donation receipt for your records.
Preparing for the upcoming winter season!

While we still have good weather, now is the time to prepare your home for the upcoming winter season. Here are some helpful tips.

1. Cover the top and 1/3 the area going down on your outside air conditioner unit to prevent ice and snow damage to the unit’s rotating fan blades. The ice and snow falling from your house can slightly bend the fan blades with causes and imbalance and wobble condition. As the fan rotates, this imbalance causes premature wear on the fan motor bearings which is very costly to repair. The remaining 2/3 of the bottom section of the outdoor A/C unit should remain uncovered. This will allow the natural air flow to pass through it to minimize trapped winter moisture. In addition, it helps to discourage the winter nesting of small animals which can cause costly damage to your A/C unit when they eat the insulation on the wires that control your air conditioner, which by the way, happens frequently.

2. Check your furnace/thermostat owner’s manual and change the battery in your living room thermostat on a yearly basis. If the battery dies during the winter, your heater will not work and temperatures in your home can drop to near freezing. Additionally, water pipes are subject to serious damage and potential floods especially for “snow bird” residences.

3. Take in deck furniture or securely tie it down in place to prevent damage from winter winds.

4. During the winter season, keep your deck sliding screen door in the “open” position. If left in the normally “closed” position as it is in the summertime, ice and snow could freeze could buildup in the door track and prevent you from opening the screen door without damaging it, especially in an emergency.

5. Inside the basement, turn off the water supply to your outdoor hose faucets and then go outside to open those faucets for a minute to drain any remaining water from the water line.

6. Remove and take inside any garden hoses and drain them to remove any standing water that may freeze and crack your hoses in the winter.

7. By now, make sure your lawn irrigation service provider has winterized your sprinkler system and installed a new 9-volt backup battery in the garage control unit to retain your sprinkler time/day schedule in case of a power interruption.

8. Install a new furnace filter now to ensure cleaner air and good operating furnace efficiency. Also, if your heating system has the optional built-in humidifier, now is the time to install a “water pad”. Move the humidifier’s operating vent season lever from “SUMMER” to “WINTER” mode.

9. After the last lawn mowing of the season and before the ground freezes, install orange snow stakes along your driveway and walkway to help outline these areas when snow arrives. Remove all extraneous items from your steps and walkway to help facilitate snow removal.
10. If you have a front storm door, install the glass panel into your screen/storm door to provide an extra thermal barrier for your front door that helps to keep your house warmer.

11. Inspect and replace any damaged weather stripping under the front door and interior house garage door to prevent cold winter winds from entering your home.

12. Set your ceiling fans to run “clockwise” in the winter to take advantage of bringing naturally rising hot air trapped at the ceiling level back down to re-warm your living space areas.

13. Make sure to have a supply of fresh batteries for your house flashlights in case of winter storm related power outages. Flashlights should be strategically placed throughout your home (bedroom, living room, kitchen, basement, etc.) for easy access when needed. A battery-operated radio will help keep you informed on the status of power outages and other emergencies.
Tis the season for financial scams as well your opportunity to enhance your personal financial awareness to prevent them. With the upcoming holidays and the end of the year rapidly approaching, unfortunately, there many fraudsters and scammers looking to take advantage of you as soon as you let your personal guard down. As such, these scammers may approach you via email, regular mail, telephone and even in person.

Today, with the popularity and anonymity of email, regular mailings, and even telephone calls, scammers are sending out hundreds of thousands of false communications hoping to steal your personal information for their financial gain. Please be aware of the following scenarios: claims you owe money to the IRS (Internal Revenue Service); that you have missed jury duty and you must call a special telephone number and give your Social Security number to prove your identity in order to avoid arrest; you won a foreign lottery and all you have to do is pay the tax; you just inherited millions of dollars and all you have to do is to pay a legal processing fee; you receive an emergency telephone call about a relative who was jailed in a foreign country and needs bail money and the scam stories just go on and on. Remember, if it is too good to be true, it probably is so do not become a victim.

Never give any of your personal information (Social Security number, date of birth, birthplace, mother’s maiden name, etc.) to a stranger that contacts you. Many times, scammers will use a phony survey to access this information. By innocently sharing that information with others, it can be used to steal your identity and cause you financial loss and emotional distress.

One of the more recent aggressive telephone scams is that you receive an urgent call from a computer technician claiming that your computer has been infected with a malicious a computer virus and that they can remove that virus for a small fee. Never give any unsolicited caller electronic access to your computer by typing in a special code that has been provided by that caller. By doing so, the scammer will have complete access to your computer and its contents as well as placing an actual virus in the computer to electronically lockup your computer and then they demand an exorbitant ransom payment.

As we all know, good credit matters in our everyday financial lives. Did you know your credit reports can affect your mortgage rates, credit card approvals and even your home and car insurance premiums? How often, if ever, have you reviewed your credit reports? Wouldn’t it be nice to see what the credit reporting agencies are saying about your credit history?

As such, it is incumbent for you to periodically review your credit reports for its content and accuracy. Reviewing your credit reports also helps you to identify early signs of financial identity theft and your ability to correct mistakes made by the credit reporting agencies.

Because of its importance, Federal Law allows you to receive a free copy of your credit report every 12 months from each of the three national credit reporting agencies if you ask for them. Those credit reporting agencies are: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. There are number of companies that advertise that they either offer for “free” or for a fee, a copy of your credit reports. However, www.annualcreditreport.com, telephone number (877) 322-8228, is a company that is authorized by Federal Law to provide you with your free annual credit reports. You can make your free credit report requests either by going to their official website or by calling their toll-free telephone.
It should be noted that your free credit reports will not contain your credit scores. Your credit score is the result of mathematical formulas that are used by the credit reporting agencies based on your credit report. Your credit score is a calculated three-digit value which suggests your creditworthiness and how likely you are to pay your bills in the future. This credit score is used to make financial decisions about extending credit to you. Your optional credit score is available to you, for a fee, from each of the three national credit reporting agencies. Each agency uses its own propriety mathematical formula so your credit score may vary from each agency. Today, however, most credit card companies include your credit score on your monthly statement free of charge.
All Around The House Tips for Great Island Homeowners January, 2017

Have you recently discovered small four legged unwanted guests living in your basement? Yes, we are talking about small field mice that traditionally live outside in the grassy areas of the great outdoors. But now that the weather has turned cold, traditionally, these little creatures instinctively seek shelter in buildings away from the cold temperatures, snow, and ice. So generally, that means they like to visit your basement where it is a comfortable, dry, and warm environment that is usually free of any disturbances. Keeping mice from entering your home is vital to your family’s good health.

The best way to get rid of mice is by stopping them from getting into your house in the first place. The key to solving this problem is generally quite straightforward and simple. Remember, mice can climb vertical surfaces, so look both high and low for possible points of entry. During the bright daylight hours, carefully inspect your basement walls, under and around the basement door leading to the backyard bulkhead hatchway, around window frames, vents, and utility line access points for daylight shining through those areas.

Because of their small size and soft skeletal frame, mice can easily squeeze through an opening as small as 3/8” of an inch (just a little bigger that the diameter of a pencil) to enter your home. The key to good mouse proofing is to permanently seal any openings with non-rusting copper mesh or aluminum screening and then cover it with weather resistant caulk or mortar cement. Do not use “steel wool” as the steel will eventually rust and disintegrate thereby staining the surrounding areas with stain streaks as well as allowing mice to re-enter your home at some point in the future.

If you have a metal bulkhead doorway, it is important to have a tight-fitting basement door sweep on the bottom of your outside basement door as well as good weather stripping around your door frame to keep those little annoying creatures from entering your basement. By its basic construction, the metal bulkhead hatchway is primarily designed to shed rainwater and snow from coming into the basement so therefore, its loose-fitting doors are not designed to keep mice out of the outside basement stairway area.

Another important entry point is along the house air conditioner pipes leading from your outdoor air compressor unit going into the house. Generally, the builder made larger holes to accommodate the installation of the unit’s pipes and the original weather sealant may have dried up and fallen out there by leaving an unobstructed highway for mice to travel in and out of your basement. The simple fix here is to purchase a very inexpensive flexible weatherproof sealant that is generically called “duct seal” which is used by electricians to seal holes where wires and pipes enter the house. Stuff and mold this clay-like sealant around all exterior pipes entering your home to seal against air leaks and mice entry. This “duct seal” product is available at all hardware stores and home centers in the electrical department.

Also, pest control experts suggest removing any outside source of food or standing water on your property. Outdoor bird feeders are one of the most appealing sources to attract mice to your property and eventually into your home. Also, unattended any pet food and water bowls should not be kept outside for this very same reason.

And if you already have a “mouse in your house”, contact a local exterminator for the best solutions to your mouse situation.
The cold winter temperatures and snow have finally arrived! But the question is .... “Is your house thermostat and its forced hot air heater ready for those cold temperatures?”

First, let’s talk about your heat/air conditioning (HVAC- Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system air filter. Did you know that an old, clogged air filter can literally can shut down your heating/air conditioning system from operating? Based on the quality and type of filter material used, most basic, low priced HVAC air filters generally are only effective for 30 operating days while the higher quality, more expensive air filters, have an operating life of 90 days or more. Always read and follow the printed filter manufacturer's instructions for best operating performance regarding the amount of time to use and replace your air filter. It is important to note that some dog and cat pet owners may find the need to change their air filter sooner should it become clogged with pet hair. A helpful tip: before installing the new air filter, always put the installation date on the filter itself and then project out the anticipated replacement date and mark it on your calendar so you don't miss this important date. Also, make sure to install your air filter with the filter arrow always pointing in the same direction as indicated on your HVAC system for proper operation.

Now, let’s talk about your thermostat which is the operating brain of your house furnace and air conditioning systems. Did you know that many thermostats require a replaceable battery to operate these systems? Many of the Great Island homes use this type of battery operated thermostat. If your thermostat requires a battery, it should be replaced on a yearly basis and a good time to do that would be when you change your smoke detector batteries; normally on the day we change our clocks for day-light savings time. Periodically, you should look at your thermostat’s digital display window to see if it is indicating a “Lo Bat” (Low Battery) condition. If this condition is displayed, you should replace that thermostat battery as soon as possible. You do not want the thermostat battery to fail in the middle of winter thereby affecting your inability to heat your house. When your house furnace/central air conditioner system was installed, it had one main heating/cooling thermostat mounted on the wall in the living room. In addition, based on the physical size and house model configuration, your house may contain a second zone house thermostat in another living area which would also have a replaceable internal battery.

The original traditional house thermostat of years ago, was considered a “dumb thermostat” that was designed to either turn “on” or “off” your HVAC system at a fixed set temperature. Fortunately, today, new smart programable thermostats are available to upgrade your home’s heating and air conditioning systems for greater efficiency and reliability. These new state-of-the-art thermostats can now also be programmed to automatically raise or lower the house temperature at predetermined times of the day to deliver savings without sacrificing comfort both in summer and winter and even when you are asleep or away. Some other full-featured thermostats can even sense when you are home or not and they can adjust your home’s temperature for economical savings on your monthly natural gas and electric bills.

The newer WIFI/Internet based thermostats also give you the ability, while you are away from your home, to monitor and adjust, in real time, your home’s temperature from your smart phone or computer. Before this new WIFI/Internet technology became available, we often relied on a neighbor to periodically check on your house to see if your furnace was working properly while you were away. While that was a nice neighborly thing to do, but the real question is, “What happens to your house if your thermostat and furnace fail to heat your home between those neighbor visits”? Unfortunately, that dreaded heating failure scenario
could lead to a house freeze-up disaster resulting in ice cold temperatures affecting plants and pets compounded with frozen water pipes and possibly water damage. However, by using the new WIFI/Internet thermostat and monitoring it daily while you are away from your home, you can feel confident in knowing that your HVAC systems are operating properly. In the event, you see that your system is malfunctioning and not maintaining a constant temperature, you can call your neighbor and immediately have a HVAC company repair the heating system before damaging freezing temperatures occur in your home.

A reputable, full-service HVAC company can inspect your heating and air conditioning systems and recommend the appropriate type of thermostat for your home based on your personal needs. HVAC experts state that these new energy efficient thermostats are easy to set up and they estimate that you can save between 5% – 10% on your heating and air conditioning utility bills. As an additional incentive to save natural gas and electric costs to operate your system, Mass Save (www.masssave.org) is offering up to a $25 rebate per programmable thermostat and up to a $100 for a WIFI/Internet thermostat that is purchased and installed.

For those homeowners who want to take a much lower tech approach to protecting their home from freezing winter temperatures while they are away, there are several types of portable “temperature freeze alarms” available on the Internet. The self-contained, battery operated, temperature sensing unit is placed near a window facing the street where your neighbors can see its light flashing when the temperature drops below a determined setting. Of course, this system is dependent on observant neighbors who will respond to your home when a temperature alarm condition occurs.