

WINTER MAINTENANCE TIPS



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Preparing your home or cottage for winter is an important annual ritual. For instance, did you know that adding insulation in your attic before winter arrives can help prevent ice dams? And don't forget that tuning up your heating system now can help prevent more costly emergency repairs at the height of a storm, when it can be difficult to find supplies and licensed contractors. The following winter maintenance tips can help you prepare your home and cottage to withstand another cold season.

Your Heating System

Before you give your heating system a workout this winter, take the time for preventive maintenance. It may help extend the life of your system and identify potential problems.

Before Winter:

- Have your furnace and other heating systems checked and serviced by a licensed contractor at least once a year, preferably before the heating season begins.
- Clean or replace any filters on forced hot air systems.
- Have your chimney checked and serviced by a licensed contractor at least once a year, with particular attention to removing creosote buildup from woodstoves and fireplaces.

During Winter:

- Have your fuel tanks filled and keep an eye on levels throughout the winter.
- Set your heat no lower than 14 degrees, as the temperature inside the walls where water piping is located is colder than the living spaces; open doors to unoccupied rooms to keep an even temperature throughout the home.
- Maintain your wood-burning or pellet stoves according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Your Insulation

If your cottage is winterized, insulation provides an important line of defense from winter's gusty winds and freezing temperatures, it is worth taking time to inspect and upgrade insulation and weather stripping before the season starts.

- Add extra insulation in the attic to help guard against ice dams. If too much heat escapes into the attic, it can warm the ice and snow on the roof. When it refreezes, it can cause an ice dam, leading to water damage or even a roof collapse.
- Add weather stripping around doors and caulk windows to guard against drafts and heat loss.

Your Utilities

Freezing temperatures can be especially damaging to your plumbing. If your pipes aren't drained for the winter, be sure to prepare them to withstand the cold.

- Check for water leaks and fix problems immediately; wrap water piping in UL-Listed heat tape and insulate if it is exposed in unheated areas such as garages, crawl spaces or attics. Use only thermostatically-controlled heat tape if your water piping is plastic, and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Learn how to shut off your water and know where your pipes are. In a freeze, you may be able to prevent water damage.
- If traveling, set your heat to ensure the home stays warm enough to avoid freezing, or drain all pipes and appliances.

Your Winter Safety Measures

- Trim trees and remove dead branches so they do not damage structures or cause injury if they fall due to ice, snow or wind.
- Clear gutters of leaves, sticks and other debris to ensure melting snow can drain properly. Direct downspouts away from the foundation.
- Repair steps and handrails for safety in ice and snow.
- Check smoke detectors, fire alarms and carbon monoxide detectors, and replace batteries for proper operation.

Key Supplies & Equipment

- Make sure you have snow shovels and a roof rake on hand. Stock your ice melting compound to melt ice on walkways.
- Service your generator or snowblower and store their fuel in approved containers, away from sources of heat.

CottageFirst Insurance

FOCA Members benefit from access to CottageFirst Insurance, a group insurance program designed specifically to meet the needs of cottage owners. The CottageFirst team provides knowledgeable and comprehensive guidance and will create a customized insurance solution specific to you. Cottagers benefit from bundling coverage for their home, watercraft, automobiles and more - all with discounting and coverage enhancements unique to FOCA members. Contact our team today!

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