



## Spring cleaning should include some home maintenance

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Thoughts of spring spark the beginning of long to-do lists for many homeowners who are ready for a change and want to ready their homes for whatever the season may bring. Regular checks for signs of small problems can pay off in big savings over time.

Both spring and fall are good times to put home safety first, and the top of that list is always fire safety. Remember to replace the batteries in all smoke detectors with the change to Daylight Saving Time and inspect fire extinguishers to ensure they have not become damaged or outdated.

Consider having the chimney cleaned and inspected by a certified chimney sweep. This is doubly important if you burn wood, and doing this now allows plenty of time to budget any needed repairs before the next heating season, and is much easier to schedule early in the year.

Next, test the pressure and temperature relief valve on your water heater by opening it and allowing some water to flow out. If you see little or no water, or if the valve doesn't shut off, consult a plumber or other professional to replace either the valve or the entire water heater. A faulty valve could spell real trouble and even cause an explosion. And if you put off your annual fall furnace inspection, now is a good time to schedule that, as well.

Finally, clean away lint and inspect your entire clothes dryer venting system to remove any buildup, using a long, flexible dryer vent brush designed for just this purpose. This regular maintenance may also increase the life and overall efficiency of your dryer.

Next are the actual damage control checks, like inspecting your basement walls for signs of moisture after a heavy rain. If only dampness is detected, a dehumidifier is recommended. They work well, and most are well under \$200 at home improvement stores. Signs of water intrusion may simply require that water be redirected from the foundation through re-grading or gutter placement, or may require professional help. Even when that help is needed, although not cheap, foundation issues can often be corrected for a fairly reasonable cost. Putting off the work will only increase the problem and cause damage to your home. If possible, it is also a good idea to check the joists and sub flooring beneath bathrooms, sinks and the laundry area for early signs of water leakage.

Cleaning and sealing your deck is a good task for spring. First wet the decking well with a garden hose, then brush on a mild detergent or cleaner specifically formulated for deck material, let it sit for 20 minutes and then rinse off. When dry, finish with a waterproofing material. Good maintenance will help that expensive decking last for years. Taping newspaper or other protective material over nearby siding will protect it from wayward splashes.

Checking for outdoor deterioration of siding and window sills is also a good idea. Use a small awl to probe suspect areas for soft spots, and repair while the weather is good. Clean siding with a mild detergent attached to your garden hose, keeping in mind that pressure washers can actually force water under your siding, and do more harm than good. Check attic and crawlspace vents for tears or small openings to ensure bats and other critters don't try to invade your living space. Then check for air leaks, replacing weather stripping and caulk, as needed, just as you do in the fall, and ready your air conditioner for warm weather by cleaning any debris from the condenser.

While many of these tasks are easy for most homeowners to do themselves, others, like replacing a handful of shingles or even cleaning the gutters may require outside help. Often, just knowing who to call creates a problem. For instance, getting a roofer to come out for small jobs can be almost impossible. And what if you just aren't sure you want to climb into the attic? These are valid concerns.

The answer may be to hire a handyman service, and there are some good ones available in the Sioux Falls area. Most charge by the hour for services as small as changing the bulbs in out of reach fixtures to building full-scale, home additions.

Paul Rowenhorst, regional owner of Handyman Matters, a national franchise, provides these services in the Sioux Falls area and several nearby cities. Such services provide reliable people, experienced in their field that are licensed, insured, and bonded.

Rowenhorst says, "I have five requirements for my employees. They must pass a background check and be on time, present a good appearance, be a good communicator and have at least ten years of experience."

Such standards ensure professional help and come with a much more practical price than hiring a contractor for many smaller jobs. Need a new sink and faucet installed? Got a tile job or a sagging gate? This may be the way to go. Estimates are available for larger jobs, and Handyman Matters has a great website ([www.handymanmatters.com](http://www.handymanmatters.com)) that will give homeowners more ideas of the services they can offer.