

Save Yourself Money by Performing a Systematic “Spring Maintenance”

by Jack Mayes

With the arrival of spring, properties should think about spring maintenance. If you want to avoid severe problems and expenses in the months and years to come, spring is the time to give attention to your roofs, gutters, foundations, plumbing, electrical system, doors, windows, siding, paint and any components damaged by winter weather.

A systematic maintenance approach allows you to monitor conditions and components. Regular roof inspections, for example, will give you enough advance warning to allow for several quotes in order to make an educated and cost effective purchase of a new roof covering.

Regular maintenance of one area or another is not necessarily achievable for some properties, but if this is the case, consider an outside contractor to perform maintenance inspections and to perform minor or major repairs. If you do contract the work, consider these guidelines.

1. Ask each candidate for a firm bid, based on exactly the same plan or discussions. Have your plans – or intentions - as complete as you can. The lowest bid may not be the best deal; it’s more important to choose a reliable, responsible company whose work you admire, and with whom you feel comfortable.
2. For some jobs, you will want a written contract; this binds and protects both you and the company that you hire. Not just a legal document, a contract is a list of expectations of both parties. When every detail is written down, a contract can help minimize the possibility of misunderstandings later. Look it over carefully before you sign.
3. The contract should identify the participants and define all work to be performed, including (as applicable) specific descriptions of materials that will be used in the project, the time schedule and payment schedule. For a contractor, it should include a set of drawings and state who is responsible for obtaining permits and researching whether plans are according to code. Copies of or affidavits attesting to sub-contractors’ licenses and insurance coverage should be included.

Whether you do the work in-house or contract the work out, you must still determine what needs attention. By considering the needs of the property, a management team can set goals and achieve cost-effective results.

Roofs

Check shingled roofs for damaged, loose or missing shingles. Pay special attention to the ridge areas. Replace missing shingles. Check flat roofs for blisters, bubbles, open seams and bald areas. If the roof is composed of tar and gravel, check for gravel erosion. Check the roofs for broken tiles. Replace damaged tiles. Check flashing for damage. Cut back tree branches to avoid damaging roof surfaces.

Chimneys

Check the brick or siding on the chimney for damage. Check the flashing around the chimney for leaks and seal. Check the chimney cap for excess rust or damage, and metal chimney tops should be checked for rust, missing rain caps and loose bracing.

Gutters

Check the gutters, hangers, downspouts and strainers for damage. Tighten any loose mountings. Spot paint any worn areas and repair or caulk any holes. Replace sections with excessive rust or holes. Remove debris from gutters and downspouts. After cleaning gutters, install wire downspout strainers.

Foundations and Grading

Check the exposed foundation for deterioration, movement and cracking. Apply sealant to any cracks to prevent insect penetration.

Check the soil level at the foundation (there should be at least a four-inch clearance). The slope from the foundation should be one inch per foot for the first six feet from the foundation. Failure to follow could cause water penetration or an easier entry for termites. Pay particular attention to the beds around the foundation, these areas are always getting new mulch, or the beds are turned which results in a higher level at the foundation.

Exterior Walls

- Check masonry walls for deteriorated brick and mortar voids.
- Check stucco walls for cracking and separation. Fill or seal as needed.
- Check wood siding and trim for rot, loose or damaged wood, caulking and soil contact. Lower the soil if needed.
- Check for loose, damaged or missing parts in metal, vinyl, insubrick, shingle and concrete mineral fiber siding.
- Check walls for settling, buckling and other evidence of movement.
- Check the expansion joints in the brick for a proper seal.
- Check the weep holes in the brick to verify that they are not plugged or blocked.

Windows

Inspect window glass and screens; check for loose or damaged window beading. Look for cracked window caulk and recaulk as needed.

Balconies and Stairwells

- Check concrete for cracks; if evident, apply a polyurethane sealant.
- Check wooden components for rot or insects, and on wood balconies, look for loose nails or excess warping.
- Check stairs and landing for cracked concrete and seal or replace as needed.
- Check handrails and pickets for rust and breaks.
- Check bolts on treads and at the top landing to be sure they are tight and secure. Replace or seal all rusted nuts or bolts.

Electrical System

- Flip all breakers off and on to ensure that they function properly.
- Hand-tighten all lugs on the breakers in the main panels.
- Check all visible wiring for looseness, frays or burn marks.
- Check the exterior light fixtures for damage and functionality.
- Check the main panels for excess rust and water marks indicating moisture penetration.
- Check the ground rods to verify that they are tightly anchored and connected.

Plumbing

Examine exposed plumbing supply lines for signs of leaks. Remove winterized protection from exterior faucets; check for leaks. Also, check the sprinkler system for leaks and exposed lines.

HVAC

Replace the filters, clean the coils, flush the evaporator drain line and check the charge on the compressor.

Raypac Boilers

Oil the pumps. Perform a temperature test to verify that the system is running at its proper temperature. The recommended range is 135 to 140 degrees. Running the system too hot will cause the unit to fail prematurely. *Have the system cleaned.* Check the fire brick on the interior of the unit for cracks or deterioration.

Exterior Paint

Check paint for flaking and/or peeling; spot painting may be the best alternative – it will eliminate moisture problems. Check for excess mildew and eliminate it with a mixture of bleach and water. Check for cracks in all vertical surfaces and seal. This will eliminate any probable moisture problems.

Miscellaneous Items

- Check retainer walls, fences and wood structures for rot, insect infestations and damage.
- Test smoke alarms and replace batteries if needed.
- Check fire extinguishers to be sure they are fully charged or in need of inspections.

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