

Habitat for Humanity Saskatchewan

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# Home Maintenance



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## Introduction

This class is designed to give you details on basic home maintenance and the more important maintenance issues you can expect to encounter caring for your new home. These recommendations are intended to provide you with a basic understanding of the maintenance requirements of your home.

No home is maintenance free. Proper and timely maintenance can extend the life of many of the components and systems incorporated in your new home and help you to protect your investment. Undertaking maintenance is not for everyone. If you are uncomfortable undertaking any specific maintenance task, you should hire a professional. Just remember, if your water heater starts leaking, your furnace breaks down, appliances fail, plumbing stops working, you are responsible for having the issue fixed and cost associated with it.

## The Importance of Home Maintenance

### Maintaining the Condition of Your Home

It is important to remember that the home you own is an asset to you, which means that you should care about its value and what that means for you and your family.

In the future if you decide to sell your home, Habitat Saskatchewan gets the first right of refusal. Once you inform that that you are looking to sell, Habitat will take a deep look at how you cared for your property while owning it. If you do not keep up with proper home maintenance to keep your home in good shape, Habitat will not buy your home. Therefore, you can see why it is important for you to keep up with maintaining your property.

### The Financial Cost of Maintaining a Home

Keeping a house in good working order costs money. Therefore, it's best to think ahead and prepare for both routine maintenance and unexpected costs. You no longer rent and the financial obligation with owning your property is solely on you!

It's recommended to budget for these costs and set aside money monthly in a separate account so that you are always prepared for anything that comes up.

## List of Home Maintenance

### Appliances

The majority, if not all, of the appliances that are in your new home come with a manufacturer warranty, which will be included in your homeowner package. It is your responsibility to fill out these warranty forms and send them to the manufacturer.

Any appliances included with the purchase of your new home will have been checked to ensure they operate properly. Appliances generally come with instructions, which detail the operating procedures for the specific appliance. These instructions must be followed to maintain the manufacturer's warranty.

With dryers, check and clean the exterior vents monthly as they commonly become plugged with lint which reduces the efficiency of the dryer and can be a fire hazard.

## Cabinets and Countertops

### Plastic Laminate Countertops

#### Care Tips:

- Laminated countertops will burn or delaminate if hot pots or pans are placed directly on the surface. Protective potholders should be used if the hot items are to be placed on the countertop. The damage caused by hot items is generally not repairable, so it is best to be careful.
- Abrasive cleaners or steel wool should not be used, as the surface of the laminate will scratch.
- The ability to withstand scratching does vary with the laminate material used.
- Household bleach or solvents can stain or discolour the laminate.
- Clean the surface of plastic laminates with a damp, soapy cloth, or sponge. For stubborn stains, use a mild household cleaner and rinse thoroughly with clear water. *\*Be aware that some liquid cleaners contain abrasives and/or solidify at the mouth of the container. These hard-solid pieces can scratch the surface if they inadvertently get on the cleaning cloth or sponge used to clean the laminate surface.*



### Cabinets

Cabinet doors have screws on the hinges that can be adjusted with a screwdriver. Most cabinet surfaces can be cleaned using a damp cloth and a mild detergent. Abrasive cleaners should not be used. Grease splattered on the surfaces should be removed immediately as it becomes more difficult to remove as it solidifies.

## Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon monoxide is a common by-product of burning natural gas, gasoline, and solid fuels (i.e., wood and pellets). If properly installed, maintained, and operated, your burning appliances should produce little carbon monoxide; however, when improperly vented or when oxygen is restricted from reaching the gas burner, carbon monoxide will be produced and can rise quickly. Ensure your family knows what the carbon monoxide alarm sounds like and review emergency exit procedures regularly.

Carbon monoxide detectors are different than smoke detectors and are used to detect abnormally high levels of carbon monoxide gas (carbon monoxide is invisible and odourless). Some Habitat homes have a smoke detector that is also a carbon monoxide detector, therefore you need to make sure you understand how it operates when you move-in. Read the guide of your carbon monoxide detector carefully to familiarize yourself with its operation.

#### General Maintenance

- Test your carbon monoxide detectors each month by pressing the “Test” button.
- Replace the batteries in your carbon monoxide detectors when needed.
- Vacuum or dust your carbon monoxide detectors regularly.
- Check the expiry date on your carbon monoxide detectors.

## Concrete Basements

Concrete basement floors may experience some minor cracking. Minor cracks on a basement floor slab do not prevent the slab from performing its function. The rate of the minor cracking depends on the amount of moisture under the slab, the relative humidity in the basement, and the porosity of the concrete.

Moisture is always present in the soil around your home. The amount of moisture may temporarily increase during the spring when the snow melts and during heavy or prolonged rains.

### **Water present in or below ground surface is managed by**

Coating walls that are below grade with materials such as a spray applied bitumen and/or specialized drainage mats that can resist the movement of water from the wall exterior. Collecting and draining water that encounters the exterior wall below grade with a weeping tile system. Refer to Sump Pump.

Unless there is an unusual amount of water accumulating against the wall (such as in a severe rainstorm or grade sloped toward the house due to settlement), water should not enter the basement. However, because concrete is a porous material and coatings are not continuous under the footing where the wall meets the foundation, small amounts of water may be transferred through the concrete and show up as dampness on the inside of the concrete wall.

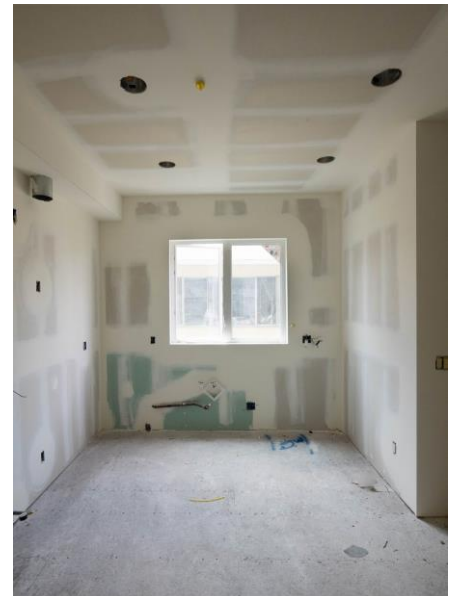
## Drywall

Drywall is made of gypsum plaster that is pressed between two sheets of paper. These wallboards are most commonly used inside homes to make interior walls and ceilings. The sheets of drywall are attached to your home's framing using drywall nails or screws and finished with a plaster-like joint compound (also known as "drywall mud") that is used to seal joints and screws/nails.

A wood-framed home can shrink vertically due to natural drying out process, adding substantial forces on virtually any rigid building component in the home including drywall. A minor drywall crack can easily be remedied with tape, mud, primed and then re-painted.

Screw/nail pops are caused when wood shrinks and expands, forcing the screws/nails holding the gypsum to work their way through the wallboard. This results in a bump in the drywall as the screw/nail forces its way through the drywall. These screw/nail pops typically appear at the upper edge of a wall or at a truss line on a ceiling.

Screw/nail pops can be repaired by replacing the nail/screw that has bulged or screwing/nailing it in further. The hole is then filled in with joint compound, primed and re-painted.



## Electrical



### Circuit Breakers

Circuit breakers automatically turn off the flow of electricity at the electrical panel when too much current is being drawn through them (commonly known as “tripping the breaker”). The circuit breaker shuts off electrical current that otherwise could result in a fire and/or personal injury. Once the electrical issue is fixed, the breaker can be reset, and power restored.

It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the electrical panel and know which breakers control what electrical areas of your home. Most electrical panels feature a chart of how each breaker has been assigned by the electrician who installed the system. Some breakers may also have an Arc Fault and/or Ground Fault function built into them. These breakers may have a separate test and reset button on them. Test these breakers monthly.

When an electrical system is facing a potential circuit overload, it responds by shutting off the electrical power. Frequent “tripping” of the circuit breakers may also indicate that the circuit is overloaded or the breaker itself is faulty. If the power outage is the result of a short circuit, as opposed to appliance overload, an electrician should be contacted to make repairs.

Appliances such as hair dryers, toasters, and kettles generate heat that tends to draw a lot of electrical current. More than one of these types of appliances in use at the same time on the same circuit can cause circuit overload. Should circuit overload occur, unplug one or more of the appliances and reset the breaker. If tripping reoccurs, contact an electrician.

### Plugs and Outlets

If a plug or outlet sparks excessively, immediately turn off the breaker and contact a professional. A small spark when an appliance is unplugged is not uncommon. Some plugs, especially kitchen plugs, bathroom plugs, or exterior plugs may have Arc Fault and/or Ground Fault function built into them. These plugs may have a separate test and reset button on them. Test these plugs monthly.

### Power is Out

If all the power in your home goes out, check to see if there is a power blackout in your neighborhood. If not, check your main breaker (in the electrical panel) and reset it after checking for current overload.

## Furnace Filters

Filters must be replaced at least once a season to allow the unobstructed flow of air through the furnace. The quality of the replacement filter used dramatically affects the air quality within the home. You cannot clean your Furnace filter – you must replace it. Filters can be bought at Walmart, Canadian Tire, and other big box stores.

## Plumbing

A main water supply shut off has been provided to shut off the water supply to your new home. This can be used in the event of an emergency and should be located upon occupancy for future reference.

Additional shutoffs may also have been provided to the sink supply lines and toilets to allow for routine maintenance.

Any waste materials, including grease, fat, and petroleum products, should not be disposed of down the plumbing system. These materials will accumulate in the piping, especially in the P-traps, and can significantly reduce the flow of water through the waste system. These substances are also very detrimental to the municipal sewage treatment systems and private septic systems.

## Plumbing Fixtures

The surfaces of the plumbing fixtures are susceptible to damage from abrasive cleaners. Use of abrasive products and steel wool pads should be avoided, as these products will cause the finish of the fixture to become dull and porous.

### Hose Bibs

Hose bibs (garden hose connections) often have a valve inside the house that can be shut off to allow the hose connection to be drained from the inside before winter to prevent freezing and possible bursting of the exterior section of the piping. These shut-off valves should be identified and shut-off in the winter months.

Once the water supply has been shut off, the exterior valve should be opened to allow the exterior portion of the piping to drain. This process is reversed in the spring once the threat of freezing is gone.



Garden hoses should not be left connected to the hose bib during freezing weather as neither can drain. Ice forming in the hose due to undrained water can break the hose or the hose bib and cause the supply pipe to freeze.

### Faucet Repair

Noisy or leaking faucets are frequently due to loose or damaged washers. Turning the fixture off with too much force can damage to the washers. Faucet handles should be turned no further than the point at which they stop the flow of water.

Faucets can generally be easily repaired by either replacing the damaged washer or the faucet cartridge itself. Basic home repair books describe how to repair typical faucets; however, due to variations in the methods of manufacture, specific instructions may be required. Contact a plumber if you are uncomfortable attempting this repair.

Green staining of fixtures is usually a water related issue due to the chemical compositions in the water and is not a builder defect.

### Plugged Toilets and Drains

Toilets are very susceptible to blockage. New toilet designs use very little water per flush. This results in a lower volume of water carrying away the waste. Repeated flushing may be required in some instances to remove solid waste. Dense tissue paper and some thick toilet papers are unsuitable for these toilets. Never dispose of hair, grease, lint, diapers, sanitary products, Q-tips, or plastic in the toilet.

Hair, grease, large food particles or other solid forms of waste can plug drains. Should they become plugged, try removing the debris from the trap beneath the fixture. Alternatively, a plunger can be used. Once partially cleared, very hot water may complete the job.

Do not continue using toilets or drains if a major blockage has occurred. Attempt to unclog the line using a plunger. If a larger blockage occurs, the services of a plumber may be required.

## Tub and Shower Enclosures

Caulking is used to seal seams and prevent water from entering behind the enclosure. If a separation occurs between the tub and the wall tiles or between the wall and the enclosure itself, it should be filled immediately with a tub sealer or caulking compound available at any home supply center. Leaving the gap unsealed may cause serious water damage to adjacent materials.

You should apply a clear liquid silicone sealer to the grout joints of the tub or shower enclosures that are finished with ceramic tile. This should be done every six months. This sealer is used to prevent the porous grout from allowing water to seep through to the substrate material behind the tile. This sealing cannot be done until the grout has cured for approximately six to eight weeks. *\*Please note, this is a liquid product and should not be confused with silicon-based caulking.*

## Heat Recovery Ventilator (HRV)

### How it Works

Some homes will be equipped with a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) for ventilation purposes. HRVs run continuously and are a superior means of controlling humidity and air quality within the home.

If your home has an HRV, ensure that the exterior supply and exhaust air hoods are free of debris. This is especially important after dandelion and poplar fuzz season. The HRV will also have interior filters that will need cleaning/replacement.



This mechanical unit continually exhausts stale warm air from within the rooms (usually the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry areas) and supplies fresh air to the remaining main living areas. The heat recovery aspect of this unit consists of a heat exchanger inside the unit that warms the fresh outside supply air with the latent heat of the stale warm air that is being exhausted.

Excessive moisture can cause mold which can lead to damage and potential health problems; therefore, it is important to keep your HRV system running properly.

### Problem Solving

- If you have excess humidity in your home, first check to make sure you have properly set your HRV control. Check the filters in the HRV unit to make sure they are clean. If the filters are not clean, you can vacuum and wash them or replace it.
- If the HRV control was not properly set and there is a buildup of humidity in the home, it may take several days to reduce the humidity level once the HRV unit is set up and running properly.
- If your door locks are not working correctly when the temperature drops, it's most likely due to moisture build up inside the locks caused by improperly set HRV control.

## Heating and Ventilation

### Furnace (Forced Air)

To increase air flow to the main and second floor, close vents in the basement and partially close vents on the main floor. To reduce air flow, open vents in the basement/main floor and partially close second floor vents.

Make sure to leave the furnace power switch on and ensure the thermostat is set properly for the season.

If your furnace does not appear to be operating, ensure that the breaker has not tripped and refer to your furnace manual to check lighting procedures. Additionally, you can check the thermostat setting to ensure it has not been turned down.

Regardless of type, the heating system is designed to maintain a minimum temperature of 21 degrees Celsius at the outside design temperature. The indoor temperature is measured in the center of the room. Temperature variations from room to room can be expected.

Always set the fan switch to auto. Program the temperature to lower while you are at work and at night to reduce heating costs.

Forced air heating furnaces have specific requirements for maintenance to operate at maximum efficiency. Furnaces usually require once a year maintenance to function properly.

Heating systems can be noisy at times due to the expansion and contraction of the pipes and other metal components of the distribution system. These noises are particularly noticeable when starting up or cooling down or at night (when it is quieter) and do not affect the performance of the system.

With forced air systems, the heat outlets and cold air returns must be kept free of any furniture or floor coverings which could block the free flow of air.

### Gas

If at any time you smell gas, contact your gas utility supplier immediately. They will check your system and advise you of any problems. This phone line is open 24/7.

Gas furnaces will be vented either through the roof or through a side wall. In winter months snow can block these vents which will cause the furnace to lock itself out and stop working. Ice may form from the moist flu gases condensing in the cold weather. If allowed to build up, the furnace may not work. Therefore, it is up to you to make sure that build-up is not happening.

### Ventilation, Condensation, and Relative Humidity

The optimum year-round humidity level to be maintained within the residence is approximately 50%. Due to seasonal variations of the relative humidity outdoors, this level of humidity can be impossible to maintain without the use of specialized mechanical equipment.

Warm air can hold more moisture than cold air; therefore, daily activities within your new home such as showering, boiling water, and even respiration create moisture in the form of water vapor. The

warm air holds this water in suspension and as this moisture-laden air encounters cold surfaces it will condense, and water will form. Condensation will fuel the creation of mold and mildew.

The failure of an owner to properly ventilate and maintain proper heating levels can seriously affect a new home and the health of the occupants.

The key to controlling humidity levels within the home and avoiding condensation is adequate ventilation. Ventilation allows the warm moist air to be exhausted from the home and replaced with dry cool air from the outdoors. This will marginally increase the cost of heating as this cold air is brought up to room temperature; however, this added cost is necessary to offset the harm high humidity levels will cause.

As the outdoor temperature drops, the surface temperature of the exterior walls will also drop. The air inside the house will not be able to sustain as high a level of relative humidity. This will cause condensation to occur on cold surfaces.

The chart below provides a rough guideline to the relative humidity levels that can be sustained within the house as the temperature drops.

| <b>Celsius</b> | <b>Outside air temperature<br/>Fahrenheit</b> | <b>Desirable maximum inside relative humidity<br/>(%) at an indoor temperature of 21C (70F)</b> |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| -29            | -20                                           | 20%                                                                                             |
| -24            | -10                                           | 25%                                                                                             |
| -18            | 0                                             | 30%                                                                                             |
| -12            | 10                                            | 35%                                                                                             |
| -7             | 20                                            | 40%                                                                                             |

Dehumidifiers are only practical in limited areas. If vented outdoors, exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathroom will remove moisture created from cooking and bathing before the vapor can circulate through the house. These fans should not exhaust into the attic space as this will only exhaust the moisture into the attic potentially causing problems. These fans need to be run often enough to remove the air borne moisture. The length of time required will depend on the number of occupants, the activities undertaken, and outdoor climatic conditions.

Windows are an effective means of ventilation. Depending on weather conditions, thoroughly airing out the home for 15 minutes a day may suffice. In addition, opening a window near the source of moisture while the exhaust fan is in operation will allow for cross ventilation and more effective moisture and odor removal.

## **Interior Sealants and Grouts**

### **Sealants**

Sealants are flexible materials that are placed where two surfaces meet to seal joints. The purpose of the “bead” of sealant is to help prevent water from finding its way behind water resistant materials and damaging the less resistant materials behind the joint. To protect water susceptible materials, sealant should be applied in a continuous, unbroken line.

Sealants are often visible at the joints between countertops and backsplashes, or where tile, walls and floors meet up with the bathtub. Over time with the natural expansion and contraction of the materials, the sealant bead may crack or separate from one or both sides of a joint.

When checking the condition of sealed joints in your home, look for discolouration or soft spots. If you notice any damage or wearing, repair the sealant joints as soon as possible.

Sealant types are specifically formulated for kitchens, bathrooms, and other appliances. Read sealant tubes carefully for information on appropriate uses and suggested applications.

If water has penetrated behind the sealants:

- Remove all or part of the old sealant bead.
- Clean and dry the area.
- Replace any damaged materials.
- Re-apply the appropriate type of sealant to the joints.
- *\*After the first-year warranty period, the maintenance and repair of the sealant is the responsibility of the homeowner.*

## Grout

Grout is mixture of fine sand and cement that forms a thin mortar and is used to fill the joints between wall or floor tiles. Manufacturers can add ingredients to create specific characteristics in grout such as colour or texture.

Typically, grout is porous and can stain. It is important to seal grouts. Check the manufacturer's specifications for general maintenance instructions. Maintaining this seal can greatly reduce discolouration. Sealers can affect the appearance of the grout by bringing out the natural colour and can help minimize moisture absorption and staining. Before applying grout sealer, identify the type of tile used and refer to the manufacturer's specifications for sealer. Different tile materials have different absorption characteristics which affect the look and ability to clean the tiles after sealer is applied.

Grout can easily become discoloured (especially lighter shades) by routine activities. Even something as simple as washing a tile floor can cause grout to discolour over time. There are a variety of cleaners and sealers available on the market to restore and maintain the grout. Consult your tile manufacturer for cleaning instructions and sealant application recommendations.

## Laminate Flooring

Laminate flooring is composed of a top wear layer, a pattern layer, and one to two rigid layers that provide impact resistance and connection points for the flooring system. These layers consist of an engineered wood product and are susceptible to swelling when exposed to moisture. Most new laminates include some type of moisture sealant to protect against moisture penetration.



While laminate flooring is generally very hard wearing, it can still be damaged. If chipped, laminate floors cannot be sanded and refinished as solid hardwood flooring can be.

Laminate is installed in such a way that they can accommodate expansion. Often referred to as floating floors, deflection can sometimes be felt when walking across them. This is normal.

### **General Maintenance**

- Laminate floors are designed to be relatively maintenance free. You may sweep, vacuum, or use a damp mop with water and a cleaning product approved by the manufacturer.
- Do not use abrasive or harsh cleaners or scouring pads on your laminate floors. Contact the manufacturer for recommendations on removal of stains.
- Wax, polish, and lacquers should not be used on laminate floors.
- Never use a steam cleaner on a laminate floor.
- If your laminate flooring has swelled due to exposure to water, contact the supplier to arrange for a professional repair.

## **Paint**

The majority of the interior drywall surfaces of your new home will be finished with either a latex (water-based) or alkyd (oil-based) paint. Maintenance can quite easily be carried out by gently washing the painted surfaces with a mild soap or detergent solution. Abrasive solutions or over scrubbing should be avoided as this will remove the paint.

## **Roof and Gutters**

### **Roof**

The life expectancy of the roof will depend on the product used and the care and maintenance provided. Loose, broken, or missing shingles following heavy windstorms should be repaired or replaced.

Storm related damage is not the builder's responsibility; therefore, maintenance repairs should be made as soon as possible after such occurrences to prevent leakage. Leakage can cause serious damage to the interior of your new home or further damage to the remainder of the roof.

All forms of roofing are intended to shed water and prevent its entry into the residence. Obstructions that prevent the free flow of water off the roof can cause leakage and/or premature failure of the roofing material. The roof and ancillary flashings must be kept free of debris and build-up of ice or snow. While cleaning the roof is recommended annually, the roof surface should also be checked for excess debris after every heavy windstorm. This is especially true if trees surround the home.

### **Ice Dams**

Snow melting on the roof and freezing as it runs off at the un-insulated overhang or eave of the roof can cause ice damming. Ice dams can cause water to back up under the shingles which will result in a leak inside. This is a natural occurrence and generally is not due to a builder defect. When ice dams occur, the snow and ice should be removed off the roof at the eaves and valleys.

### **Gutters and Downspouts**

Gutters are often installed at the perimeter of the roof to control the runoff of rainwater. They also serve to prevent the rainwater from being deposited alongside the foundation wall where it could

eventually seep into the basement or splash water and mud up onto the surface of the wall. If the gutters or the down pipes become clogged with debris or ice, water damage can occur.

Keep gutters, roof drains, and downspouts free of obstructions such as leaves, tree needles, and moss. Washed down by rain, particles from asphalt shingles can settle in the gutters and reduce their efficiency. As with the roof, the gutters should be checked for obstructions at least twice a year and after every heavy windstorm or after prolonged periods of freezing and thawing.

## Site/Lot Drainage and Grading

Site drainage is designed to make sure no water collects near the outside perimeter of your home. To make sure this doesn't happen, soil is built up to create a slope away from your home. If you see water pooling near your home, make sure you fill in any holes and create the same slope so that the water cannot seep in.

Window wells are a means of providing a window for a basement below grade. Window wells must be kept free of ice, snow, leaves, and other debris which may block the drainage system provided and flood your new home.

Ice, snow, leaves, and other debris can block the flow of drainage and must be seasonally maintained. Care must be taken not to permanently alter the drainage flow to cause an ongoing drainage problem.

## Smoke Detectors

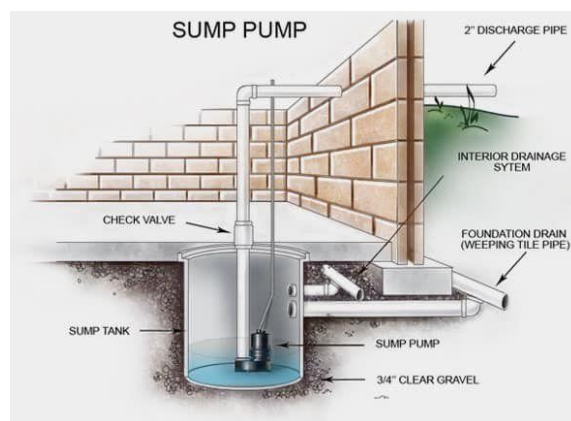
Smoke Detectors should be tested monthly to ensure their proper operation and be cleaned twice a year with a vacuum.

*\*Please note that these devices are connected directly to the electrical system of the home and do not require batteries. However, they will not operate in a power outage unless the unit has a backup battery. If there is a battery backup, the battery should be changed every 6 months.*

## Sump Pump

Sump pumps move water from your basement out of your home. A sump is a naturally constructed pit, usually a hole carved below the main surface of your basement floor. This pit, known as a basin, holds the sump pump. The pump is equipped with valves that sense escalating water levels or pressure.

Your sump pump can be a godsend when water comes pouring into your basement, but that only applies if your pump is working efficiently. To keep it in tip-top shape so it can do the job it is designed to do, you need to perform some routine maintenance throughout the year. Follow these tips for keeping your sump pump ready for whenever a big rainstorm strikes.



## Sump Pump Maintenance

### Clean the Sump Pump

It is easy to think your sump pump can take care of itself as it whisks dirty water and debris away from your home. But the truth is it needs your help occasionally. Remove the pump from the basin and clean the screen on the bottom. This can get clogged with dirt and gunk as it sucks up dirty water. For best results, clean the pump after major uses or at least once per year, depending on how often you use the pump.

### Clean Drainage Pipes

While you are in cleaning mode, check the drainage plumbing for any signs of blockages or clogs. Remove any debris in or around the pipes to keep water running freely when your sump pump is in use. If you have problems clearing the pipes, call a plumber.

### Test the Sump Pump

Knowing your sump pump is ready to go whenever the need arises will give you peace of mind and may avoid the cost of emergency calls to the plumber. To test the pump, fill the basin or sump pit with water. If it is functioning properly, the pump will automatically turn on and begin pumping out the water. Remove the pump from the water and check that it turns off on its own.

### Level the Sump Pump

Your sump pump can easily be knocked off kilter from the hard work of pumping away flood waters. Check that it sits level in the pit or basin to get the most efficient use from your pump.

### Check the Power Source

Check the electrical cord for any signs of damage and ensure that it is connected to a ground fault circuit interrupter. This prevents injuries if the pump malfunctions or faults in the cords occur. This is also the time to check that your emergency back-up source is connected properly. When big storms blow in, you are likely to lose electricity too. A backup battery or generator will ensure that your sump pump can run even if the electricity is lost. Always keep it plugged in.

### Seasonal Checks

The sump pump should be checked every spring and fall. This can be done by lifting the float to engage the pump. Disconnect and roll up the discharge hose outside of the home every fall and reinstall in the spring. Make sure your discharge hose drains away from the house.

## The House Frame

During the first cold-weather season, new construction will experience natural drying and a certain amount of shrinkage will occur. Wood expands and shrinks when the humidity changes. Minor shrinkage is normal for all wood construction and does not affect the structural integrity of your home. In many cases the gaps or openings caused by shrinkage can be attributed to temperature extremes on either the interior or exterior walls. These gaps and cracks (referred to as Thermal Bowing) become less noticeable when temperatures level out.

You may notice the effects of humidity changes and shrinkage with the appearance of gaps, cracks, and squeaks on the interior components of your home.

## Truss Movement

The ceiling of your home is attached to the lower chords of wooden trusses, which tend to shrink and expand seasonally when temperatures and humidity changes. During colder months, you may notice the effects of these truss movements when a slight gap appears between the interior walls of your home and the ceilings. This is commonly referred to as Truss Uplift. As the trusses expand and contract, the ceiling can lift slightly off the walls of your home. The ceiling will then move back into place during warmer months. This is not uncommon.

One solution to address truss uplift is to install decorative crown moldings to minimize the cosmetic effect of seasonal truss movements.

## Vinyl Flooring

Vinyl flooring (otherwise known as “Resilient Flooring”) refers to a family of plastic flooring that is comfortable to walk on and offers impact absorption and durability. Vinyl flooring is available in a variety of colours, textures, and sizes.

### General Maintenance

Vinyl or resilient flooring can be cleaned with a damp mop, lukewarm water, and a mild soap or detergent. Harsh cleansers can cause fading or discolouration and may even make some materials hard and brittle. Avoid abrasive cleansers as these can scratch vinyl flooring. Stubborn scuffs can usually be removed with a damp cloth and some effort.

Where vinyl floor tiles have been installed, use a limited amount of water. Excessive water may seep between tiles and cause damage. Uplifted edges or corners should be repaired immediately to prevent water from seeping under the flooring and increasing the amount of lifted flooring. Refer to manufacturer for further maintenance and repair guidelines.

Resilient flooring is soft and susceptible to dents or depressions from heavy furniture. Usually, the impressions will restore themselves when the pressure point has been lifted. These dents can be reduced with the use of floor protectors (felt coaster) that help distribute the weight over a larger surface area. Resilient flooring is subject to the same fading when exposed to constant and direct sunlight. Window coverings will reduce this effect.

Some materials are incompatible with resilient flooring and can cause yellowing or discolouration. Prolonged use of latex-backed carpets, oven cleaners, hair sprays, and foods can cause this reaction to occur.

## Vinyl Siding

Vinyl siding is generally a maintenance-free exterior finish that can be washed occasionally with a mild detergent and a garden hose to remove dust. Do not use a power-washer to clean vinyl siding because the pressure can force water behind the siding and cause water to leak into the wall of your home.

## Water Heater (Hot Water Tank)

Typically, there are two types of water heaters: storage tank and tankless (on demand) systems. A storage tank water heater can be electric, gas-fired, or indirectly fired through a boiler system. The controls for most storage tank water heaters are located at the base of the tank. These controls are used to adjust the temperature, shut down, or turn on your hot water tank.

The water temperature of the hot water tank can be adjusted on the thermostat located on the tank. This may require the use of a screwdriver. An average setting for the water temperature is 140°F which is adequate for dishwashers. This temperature is hot enough for most uses but will not cause scalding or burns. If hotter water is needed for a specific purpose, the thermostat on the tank can be set to a higher temperature; however, the thermostat must be reset to a normal setting when finished.



Hot water tanks are equipped with a pressure relief valve at the top of the tank. This is a safety feature that will open and relieve water pressure if the tank exceeds its rated working pressure. If water or water stains are evident at the discharge pipe leading from the relief valve, contact a plumber as this is an indication that the normal operating pressure of the tank has been exceeded.

A tankless, or on demand system will be engaged as soon as a hot tap is turned on. The controls for a tankless system should be on the face of the unit.

If you ever have issues with your water tank, always call a plumber. If your hot water tank is under warranty, you can call the company to arrange a repair time. Habitat does not keep your warranty information, nor is their responsibility to arrange this.

### General Maintenance

- If your water heater stops producing hot water, check the breaker panel.
- Replace the anode rod (if applicable) according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Flush your hot water tank in accordance with the manufacturer's directions to prevent sediment from accumulating at the bottom of your hot water tank.
- Do not tamper with your tank's pressure relief valve.
- Refer to manufacturer's recommendations for general maintenance of your specific water heating system.

## Windows and Exterior Doors

### Windows

Current building standards require the use of triple-glazed sealed units mounted in thermally broken frames. There is a wide assortment of frame types and the material used can vary widely. One rule is to always keep your windows and the screens clean, and never cover your windows with tinfoil to keep light out as this will damage the window seal and you will have to get your windows replaced.

Windows may open in different fashions:

- They may slide horizontally or vertically, open outwards like a door, or tilt open in the fashion of an awning.

- Typical windows require minimal maintenance. Window hardware should be cleaned and lubricated annually. Any accumulated grime or debris should be removed from between the window and the frame.
- Most window designs incorporate a drainage track at the bottom of the window to collect any condensation that runs off the glazing. These tracks will have weep holes to the outside to drain this moisture. These holes must be kept clean and can be maintained with a short piece of wire or a cotton swab.

If high relative humidity levels occur inside your new home during periods of very cold weather, condensation and frost on the inside face of the windows will occur. This is a ventilation issue and is not a fault with the window. Condensation can result in the growth of mold on the window frame that can be controlled with a mild solution of bleach and water.

If you have an HRV system in your home (please see [Heat Recovery Ventilator](#)), you need to make sure that you control the humidity levels by using the dial on the panel. This will help solve the issue with condensation on your windows, doors, and throughout the home.

Condensation between the layers of glass within the window frame indicates that the sealed unit has failed. The glazing unit will require replacement as there is no method of repairing sealed units. If failure of the sealed unit occurs after the expiry of the first year of warranty coverage, contact your window supplier as the cost of this repair may be partially borne by the manufacturer.

Make sure all windows properly latch and screens are properly installed. Inspect the weather stripping for damage every spring and fall.

## Doors

Exterior swing doors are generally made of solid wood, metal, wood over a foam core, or fiberglass. Sliding patio doors are usually constructed with metal or vinyl frames and are supplied by the window manufacturer.

Exterior doors are exposed to aggressive weather conditions and extreme temperature variations which can harm to the surface of the door. Variations in the relative humidity from the interior to the exterior can also affect the door. Collectively or separately, these conditions can cause doors to warp or change in dimension. Seasonal variations can occur up to ¼" in any direction. Make sure you check and/or adjust the weather stripping at the bottom of the door every season to ensure there is a tight seal.

Always keep in mind that houses shift over time, therefore this could shift your doors and you will have to look at getting them adjusted over time. Make sure all doors latch and lock properly.

## Interior Doors and Trim

Check the interior doors for proper latching. If the door is not operating properly, it is generally caused by the changing of seasons which could cause the home to shift. This movement is normal and minor adjustments to the door may be required.

Do not use chemicals while cleaning. Instead, use warm water and soap. Any chips, scuffs or marks on the doors or trim can be touched up with paint.

# Seasonal Home Maintenance Checklist

Here is a checklist that we have created for you to print off and post it on your fridge if that will help to remind you on what things you should be doing seasonally to take care of your property:

| ITEM                                                       | ONCE A MONTH | ONCE A YEAR | SPRING | SUMMER | FALL | WINTER |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------|--------|------|--------|
| <b>EXTERIOR</b>                                            |              |             |        |        |      |        |
| Check and clean sump                                       |              |             | ✓      |        | ✓    |        |
| Check grades around house and fill in low areas            |              |             | ✓      |        | ✓    |        |
| Check weather stripping and adjust if necessary            |              |             |        |        | ✓    |        |
| Clean gutters and downspouts                               |              |             | ✓      |        | ✓    |        |
| Check roof for defects (Ice damming, etc.)                 |              | ✓           |        |        |      | ✓      |
| Check foundation for signs of leakage or damage            |              | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Drain outside hose bib (drain the water from hose)         |              |             |        |        | ✓    |        |
| <b>INTERIOR</b>                                            |              |             |        |        |      |        |
| Re-caulk showers and countertops if necessary              |              | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Lubricate door hinges                                      |              | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Check smoke detectors                                      |              | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Have furnace serviced (maintained) by professional         |              | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Change furnace filters                                     | ✓            |             |        |        |      |        |
| Clean HRV filter                                           | ✓            | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Turn off water valve to outside water tap (drain the line) |              |             |        |        | ✓    |        |
| Make sure windows can seal and shut properly               |              |             |        |        | ✓    |        |
| Make sure bathroom fans are working                        |              | ✓           |        |        |      |        |
| Check basement for leaks                                   |              |             | ✓      | ✓      | ✓    | ✓      |
| Prevent frozen pipes                                       |              |             |        |        |      | ✓      |
| Clean out dryer vent                                       |              |             | ✓      | ✓      | ✓    |        |

