



Whitepaper:

Home Maintenance Tips for First Time Homebuyers

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Introduction

Congratulations on the purchase of your home! Owning your first home is an exciting and proud moment – it can also be somewhat daunting. As property experts, we not only want to assist you in selecting the home of your dreams, but also in maximizing the value and comfort you derive from your home as long as you own it. This guide is intended to highlight the areas many new homeowners may not realize require ongoing attention and maintenance to perform properly. These points should be integrated into your overall home maintenance plan, additional resources for which can be found at the end of this document.

Garage Door

Your garage door is one of the most overlooked of all home appliances, and also one of the most dangerous. Garage doors are typically very heavy and are controlled by a spring or cable, and roller and track system that assist the door panels to move up and down. If an electronic opener is attached, this system is controlled by an electronic switch and motor that moves the door at the touch of a button.

Action Items

- Doors should be kept lubricated by applying a spray such as silicone spray on the spindles (see photo 1) as needed, but at least twice a year. Do not spray the insides of the tracks and never use grease.



Photo 1: Spindles

- Inspect the door lift bracket assembly to ensure it is fully connected. Lubricate the moving parts periodically. (See photo 2).



Photo 2: Door Lift Bracket Assembly

- Make sure the electronic door sensor at the base of the track on either side are properly aligned with each other so that the door will reverse if something crosses the sensor's path. (See photo 3).



Photo 3: Door Sensor

- Conduct a wood block reversal test once or twice a year. A wood block reversal test involves the placement of a 2 x 4 wood block on its wider side on the floor where the door will contact it when it closes. Once the door contacts the block it should immediately reverse. This test ensures that a dog, adult or child will not be crushed and held down by the door at floor level. This test and the electronic sensor test above are different tests that are NOT testing the same system (See photo 4).



Photo 4: Wood Block Reversal Test

Clothes Washer and Dryer

Just like other elements in your home, the washer and dryer require periodic attention to function at peak performance and to extend their useful life.

Action Items - Washing Machine Supply Hoses

- Consider converting rubber washing machine hoses to wire mesh hoses; wire mesh is less likely to leak at the couplings.
- Turn off both the cold and hot water supply valves after every load to help prevent a leak at the hoses (see photo 5). Hose leaks at washing machines can cause significant damage to the house due to the high pressure and volume of water.



Photo 5: Cold and Hot Water Supply Valves

- Consider having a licensed plumber install a unified ball valve that allows you to easily turn off both hot and cold supplies with a quarter turn of a single handle.

These types of valves are made for frequent on and off movements and are more dependable than the shut-offs that are typically installed at the laundry water supply box.

Action Items - Dryer Exhaust Hose

According to the National Fire Protection Association, dryer vent hoses are a major source of residential home fires and can present a significant safety hazard if not properly maintained.

- Keep the dryer lint filter clean and be certain that your dryer vents to the exterior of the home. Clothes dryers should never vent to the interior or to the attic space as warm moist air contributes to the formation of microbial growth.
- All dryer exhaust hoses should be made of metallic material. Plastic hoses (typically white in color) should be replaced as they have been shown to burn.
- All dryer vent hoses should be cleaned at least annually. This should include an inspection of the connections at both the clothes dryer vent material and at the wall, to ensure that the flexible vent material has not been crushed or crimped. Dryer vent connections that are partially detached or have holes should be sealed or the dryer vent material should be replaced.

Water Heater

In general, water heaters are low maintenance appliances. Make sure you know where the cold water shut off is located (on the cold water inlet pipe above the top of the heater; see photo 6). If your heater is new, we recommend regular, periodic draining of the tank to remove sediment build-up. Sediment can damage both the tank and the plumbing components, and draining the tank is quite easy. If the water heater is more than a year or two old however, draining the tank may cause the drain valve to leak or not completely shut off as a result of turning. You would then need to repair or replace the valve, a project that can be quite challenging for most homeowners or may require a licensed plumber.



Photo 6: Cold Water Inlet Pipe and Ball Valve Shut-off)

Action Items – Water Temperature

- Set the water heater thermostat to a temperature no higher than 120 degrees. If the thermostat doesn't show actual temperature, try using the "medium" setting and wait a few hours before testing. The key is to not have scalding water coming out of the faucet. In addition, the hotter your water, the more energy you use.

Action Items – Draining the Tank

Here is a step-by-step guide to draining your hot water tank:

1. Turn off the gas line valve (located on the gas line that runs to the appliance), if gas fired and any electric circuit that may be running to the heater, or turn off the breaker for the electric water heater if electric. If the system is not conventional gas or electric, consult with a plumber before draining.
2. Turn off the cold water valve that supplies cold water to the heater. The valve is typically located at the top of the water heater and is connected to the cold (often marked blue) inlet pipe. See Photo 6 above.
3. Look for the drain valve at the base of the water heater. Connect a drain hose to the threaded drain coupling. Run the drain hose to the exterior and far enough away from the home where it will not cause damage. Drain the tank completely by opening the valve. See photo 7 below.



Photo 7: Drain Valve

4. Close the drain valve, remove the hose and **TURN COLD WATER SUPPLY BACK ON**. Do not turn the gas or electric back on until the tank is completely filled. If an electric water heater is empty and the electricity is turned on, the top and bottom heating elements will heat up without being immersed in water and they will fry.

Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning (HVAC)

HVAC systems are some of the most sophisticated and costly items in the home. We recommend annual maintenance of both the heating and the air conditioning by qualified technicians. This typically involves cleaning as well as a review of proper operation. In the case of cooling systems, it may involve pressure testing for leaks and the need to add refrigerant.

Action Items – Vents

- Install vent filters in the return vents of HVAC systems such as furnaces and heat pumps. These filters come in many different forms. In general, we recommend a mid-level filter of medium thickness for most homeowners. The basic thin blue filters tend to not trap very small particles and the thicker more expensive filters tend to significantly reduce air flow to the duct system. This negatively affects system performance.
- Look for dirty grills at both return and supply vents on the ventilation system. Dirty grills impair performance and may cause dirt and dust to become airborne. Keep grills clean by either vacuuming or spraying with a non-toxic cleaner and then cleaning with a rag.

Sink & Tub Drains

Proactively cleaning your drains periodically will prevent excessive build up of debris and scum that can grow into a significant problem.

Action Items

- Use hot water at each faucet and let it run into an open drain for about 5 minutes. The heat will help to clear debris such as hair and soap scum from the inside of the P trap. This will help to maintain a clear flow of water at the drain. If debris still exists, you can carefully use a bent coat hanger with a small hook bent on the end to push into the drain and to pull out the debris. This suggestion is much less expensive and much easier on your plumbing than the use of liquid drain cleaners.

Toilets

Any appliance that uses water should be paid special attention, especially one used as frequently as the toilet.

Action Items

- Verify the proper operation of the toilet and ensure that it shuts off completely after the flush cycle is done by opening the tank cover and watching the full flush cycle until completion.
- Make sure the toilet closet bolts (they hold the toilet to the floor) are secure and that the toilet doesn't rock back and forth.
- Ensure that the caulk at the base of the toilet is in good shape; it's there to help prevent water from a wet mop from damaging the flooring material underneath the toilet.
- Check all connections and bolts, including the water supply line for leaks at both couplings and the supply shut-off, as well as the tank hold-down bolts if installed.

Door & Windows

Door and window maintenance is easy and often overlooked. Keeping doors and windows clean and lubricated is important, particularly in climates with very high or very low temperatures as hardware expands and contracts from heat or cold.

Action Items

- Use a vacuum to clean door and window tracks, thresholds and sills. Dust and debris can prevent proper closure of doors and windows, and can cause damage to the hardware.
- Once clean, we recommend lightly spraying moving parts such as hinges, handles and locks with silicone spray to keep them moving freely.

Routine maintenance and inspections of your home will not only decrease repair costs, but are crucial in maximizing the value of your home. Make a wise decision to take note of the items above and write them on a calendar you look at regularly, so you won't forget which items need to be routinely evaluated when the time arrives.

In addition to the information contained within this whitepaper, you can access a free seasonal maintenance checklist from the Inspect-It 1st website: <http://www.inspectit1st.com/buying-a-home/maintenance-checklist.html>. For further maintenance information related to specific items/components within the home, please visit: <http://www.inspectit1st.com/buying-a-home/maintenance-guide.html>.

Links to Further Information

All About Home

<http://www.allabouthome.com>

House Fix Ups

<http://www.housefixups.com>

Popular Mechanics

<http://www.popularmechanics.com>

DIY Network

<http://www.diynetwork.com>

National Association of Home Builders

<http://www.nahb.org>

Inspect-It 1st Free Seasonal Home Maintenance Checklist

<http://www.inspectit1st.com/buying-a-home/maintenance-checklist.html>

Inspect-It 1st Free Home Maintenance Guides

<http://www.inspectit1st.com/buying-a-home/maintenance-guide.html>