

Creating A Safe *Home for the Holidays*

'Tis the season for turkey dinners, gift-giving and—invariably for most of us—throngs of descending house-guests. That makes it the ideal time to make sure your home is safe and prepped for your friends' and family's arrival. Below are a few tips to help make your holiday-time maintenance a bit easier so that you can get on with celebrating the joys of the season.

Walkways and Stairs

Are your walkways and exterior steps free of trip hazards? Have areas that tend to be slippery when wet been addressed? Are handrails leading to bedrooms or basements secure and able to withstand sufficient force if grabbed suddenly? These areas may not be easy to navigate for infrequent guests, especially in the dark or low light conditions. Take a walk in all these areas to make sure walkways are safe and stairs and handrails are secure for your approaching holiday guests.

Breathe Easy

Do you remember the last time you changed your furnace filter? If you have a forced air furnace with a disposable or electrostatic filter, every 30-90 days is recommended. Why? Dirty filters hold dust and allergens which will recirculate back into the air. Also, your blower will have to work harder to push air through the clogged filter, which shortens the life of the unit and costs you more on utility bills.

Your Water Heater

Do you know the age of your water heater? Have you drained it in the last six months? While this doesn't necessarily guarantee your water heater will get you through the holidays, it does give you an idea of the condition of the appliance and any sediment buildup. Gas water heaters typically last 8-12 years, electric 10-14 years.

A Healthy Hearth

Have you had your fireplace serviced by a professional in the last year? Is the damper in working order? For gas fireplaces, a damper should never be allowed to be fully closed. Also remember, do not burn gift wrap in the fireplace. It can throw off dangerous sparks and produce a chemical buildup in the home that could cause an explosion.

Avoid Sewer Line Clogs

Sewage is most likely *not* the first thing on your mind when it comes to preparing for your holiday festivities, but knowing your plan for preventing sewer line clogs is very important. Make sure your guests know to never place grease, oil, sauces, gravy, cookie dough, etc. in the garbage disposal. Be

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they also know to never flush clog-forming items like diapers, baby wipes, paper towels, feminine hygiene products, condoms, or rags down the toilet.

Not Home for the Holidays?

If you plan to be away from home for the holidays, have a friend or family member watch your home and collect items like mail and newspapers, which can be signs of your absence to strangers. Make sure you also give them your phone number where you can be reached in case of an emergency. ■

