

BlackEnterprise.com Home Maintenance Checklist

Routine home maintenance is essential to keeping your house running and preventing minor problems from turning into major headaches. Proper home inspection can also increase the efficiency of your house and appliances. “If you don’t [maintain your house] there’s a risk of becoming sick or even dying in your home,” says Rebecca Morley, executive director of the [National Center for Healthy Housing](#), a home research organization.

These preventative measures can help you avoid expensive repairs, extend the life of many of your home’s components, and in some cases, reduce energy consumption.

Renters are not off the hook when it comes to caring for their dwelling either: alert your landlord if any of the following needs to be done. Responsible tenants can use some of the items on the checklist to ensure their apartment is in top shape.

___ **Check roof for leaks.** Also look out for broken shingles. Inspect the interior ceiling for water stains which may indicate leaks. Water penetration can lead to dry rot and structural damage, so don’t delay in making repairs.

___ **Inspect caulking.** Remove and replace loose caulking and make sure the seals are secure. Also, be sure caulking around sinks, bathtubs, and showers is up to date. Old or fading caulking can lead to damp and moldy spaces which not only looks bad but can have a negative affect on your health, Morley says.

___ **Inspect plumbing and shutoff valves.** Check for leaks or corrosion. The valves can be turned a quarter to a half turn (to prevent from sticking), says Unigard Insurance Group. Routine maintenance of valves can prevent water damage should a pipe bust or begin to leak.

___ **Clean exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms.** Vacuum dust out of [bathroom exhausts](#); grease may be cleaned from certain range-hood filters by washing the filter in an automatic dishwasher, says the Healthy House Institute. Not only do fans remove odors from your house which improves indoor air quality, they also remove moisture, which decrease the level of humidity in your home. High humidity can damage building materials and can cause mold growth which can affect your family’s health.

___ **Trim shrubs around the house.** Plants in contact with the exterior surface of your home can promote insects and surface wear, so prune these unruly limbs *away* from your house or windows.

___ **Inspect weather stripping.** Replace any stripping around doors and windows that are hard or broken or fail to seal. Also, check doors, window frames, siding, and trim for cracks which can help prevent air from seeping in or out, says [True Value Co.](#), a hardware retailer.

___ **Inspect the furnace.** Be on the lookout for rust, odd sounds, and smells. Test for proper draft at the furnace or water heater diverter (hold a small piece of tissue paper close to the exhaust to make sure air is flowing toward), says Unigard Insurance Group.

___ **Clean gutters.** Clear debris and check gutters for corrosion, joint separation, and loose fasteners. Flush out downspouts and unclog leader pipes. Leaders should extend at least 5-feet to direct water away from the foundation, says Consumer Reports.

___ **Clean or replace the filter in heating/air conditioning unit.** Do this more often if it's recommended by the manufacturer, says Healthy House Institute.

___ **Change batteries regularly in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.** Also, vacuum dust from alarms to ensure proper operation, says Unigard Insurance Group.

___ **Clean fireplaces of ashes.** Have your [chimney](#) professionally cleaned, making sure it is checked for loose or missing mortar. Be sure the damper closes tightly. Leave the damper open for improvement ventilation if the home is not air conditioned. This can prevent damage to your home from fire or excessive smoke.

___ **Drain water and sediment from your [water heaters](#).** Be sure to replace the water and test the pressure valve. Morley recommends calling a professional to do this. "They'll come out and make sure there are no leaks and that it's drafting properly," she says. Sediment buildup can reduce the amount your water heater holds and reduce the efficiency of your unit.

___ **Check sludge level in septic tank.** When sludge reaches one-third of the tank's depth, have a professional pump out the tank to clean it. Frequency of service depends on the size of the tank and household use; tanks for houses in which there is a garbage disposal need more frequent service. Cleaning your septic tank can extend the life of the septic tank.

___ **Inspect asphalt.** Check driveways and walks for cracks, breaks, or erosion that may cause damage. Reseal, if necessary, to prevent a fall hazard.

___ **Inspect your basement and crawl space.** Look for leaks, moisture, termites, and check for cracks or any sign of dampness, which can lead to mold.

___ **Inspect walls.** Check masonry for cracks and inspect paint for wear or cracking. Sealing cracks and crevices can keep moisture out and ensure energy efficiency, says Morley.

-- *Renita Burns, BlackEnterprise.com*