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HEG84-189 Home Fixit: Maintaining The House Structure

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Home Fixit

Maintaining The House Structure

This NebGuide discusses how to establish a home maintenance plan and record, including what to look for in a maintenance inspection of the house structure.

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- [Regular Maintenance Program](#)
- [Maintenance Inspection](#)
 - [Roofs](#)
 - [Gutters and Downspouts](#)
 - [Exterior Walls](#)
 - [Doors and Windows](#)
 - [Foundation](#)
- [Inspection Plan](#)
- [Maintenance Records](#)
- [Resources](#)

Are you a homeowner? If so, you have a very important investment to protect. One of the "joys" of home ownership is the maintenance and repair of the structure of the house.

We don't always like to think about home maintenance. For example, as long as the roof doesn't leak, we don't worry about it! If we have time or money to spend on our home, we tend to want to use it on furnishings and accessories to make the home more comfortable and attractive. However, a little time, money and effort spent on regular maintenance of the house structure can prevent or reduce major repair bills--and still leave some for the "fun" things.

Regular Maintenance Program

A regular maintenance program for the home includes:

1. regular inspections of the house structure;
2. a record of inspections;
3. minor, routine repairs;

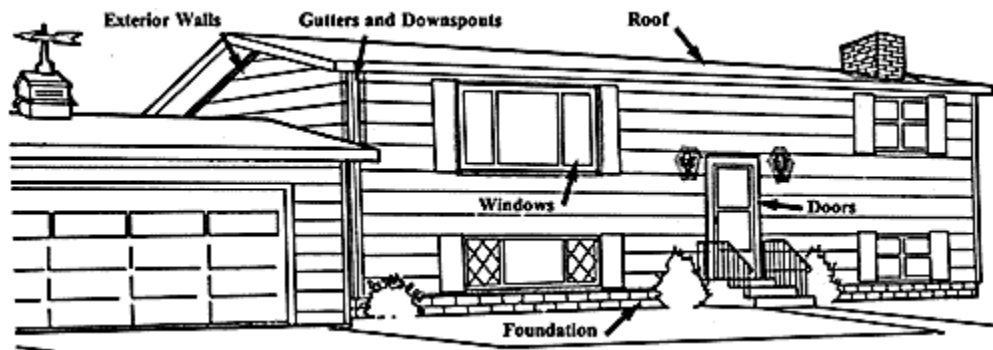
4. a record of repairs.

This type of maintenance program has several advantages. First, the routine inspections help you to get to "know" your house, its condition and state of repair. Knowing your house and keeping a record of inspections allows you to spot maintenance problems when they are small and relatively easy to repair. Making minor, routine repairs as needed prolongs the life of the house and helps prevent the need for major repairs. Finally, a record of repairs is particularly valuable if you sell your home.

A maintenance plan will not replace all major repair projects. Parts of the home, such as the roof or paint finishes, do wear out. However, a regular maintenance program will extend the life of the different parts of the home. Further, it will allow you to anticipate and plan for major maintenance expenditures.

Maintenance Inspection

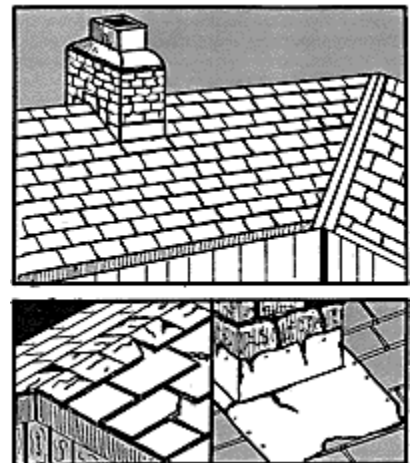
A maintenance inspection of the house structure covers it from top to bottom. Include the roof, gutters and downspouts, exterior walls, doors, windows and foundation. If your home has porches or walks, include them. Don't forget the garage!



Roofs

Depending on the style and pitch of your roof, and your feelings about heights, you may want to inspect the roof from the ground. This can be done by using a pair of binoculars to study the roof. Here are some things to look for:

- loose, curled, damaged or missing shingles;
- blisters, cracks or loose felt on flat, built-up roofs;
- loose, rusting or deteriorating flashing around chimneys, flues, dormers, etc.;
- cracked or deteriorated masonry chimneys;
- evidence of birds' nests or debris in chimneys, flues or vents (may also need to inspect from inside);
- tree branches rubbing on the roof;
- loose support wires for roof-mounted equipment.



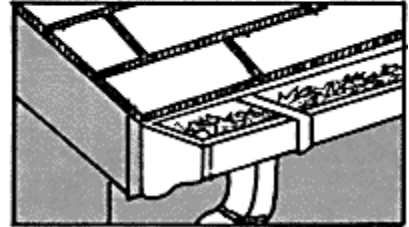
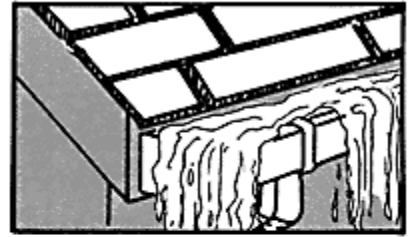
If you suspect any problems, you or a roofing specialist will need to get on the roof for a closer look and repairs. This is also true if you have interior ceiling leaks. **CAUTION: Do not climb up on your roof unless 1) the roof is dry, ice free and not too steep, 2) you practice good safety measures, and 3) you have a ground assistant.**

Gutters and Downspouts

Clogged gutters and downspouts can cause serious water damage to your home. When water cannot flow through the gutters and downspouts, it may back up on the roof and seep under shingles and the sheathing. This water can also lead to paint failure and decay of the fascia and soffit of the roof.

The next time it rains, check the gutters and downspouts on your house. Look for water flowing over the edge of the gutters, or leaking from the gutters or between the gutters and fascia board. Check the downspouts. Does water flow freely out of all downspouts?

At least once a year, clean and inspect the gutters and downspouts of your home. This requires climbing on a ladder, and may require walking on the roof (depending on the style of your house). Remove all leaves and other debris. Check to see that leaf guards or strainers are in place. Use a garden hose or bucket of water to test the water flow through each gutter and downspout. Check to see that gutters are securely fastened. Look for any peeling or cracked paint or signs of rust.



Exterior Walls

A trend in recent years is the use of low-maintenance sidings on homes. Many homeowners want to avoid the need to regularly repaint the exterior of the home. However, even low-maintenance materials need a regular inspection. Here are some things to look for:

- *wood siding*--boards or shingles that are warped; cracked, faded or peeling paint;
- *stone or masonry*--cracks; loose or crumbling mortar joints;
- *aluminum siding*--dents; faded, cracked or peeling paint;
- *steel siding*--rust; faded, cracked or peeling paint; paint;
- *vinyl siding*--cracks;
- *stucco*--cracks.

When checking the siding, be sure to inspect the trim around windows, doors, shutters, porch railings, etc. Some materials will need repair or repainting sooner than others. In addition, different parts of the house receive different exposure to weather and this will affect maintenance.

Doors and Windows

First, check the caulking and weatherstripping around all doors and windows of the home. Look for dry, loose, cracked or crumbling caulking and damaged or missing weatherstripping. For more detailed information, see *HEG 82-157, Weatherizing Your Home: Caulking* and *HEG 82-158, Weatherizing Your Home: Weatherstripping*, available from the Cooperative Extension Service office in your county.

Check the windows and doors for cracked or damaged glass and loose panes. Look for putty or glazing compound around glass panes that is loose, cracked or missing.

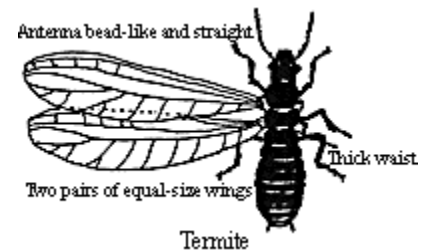
Inspect screens for holes, tears, rust and separation from the frames. Look for an accumulation of dirt, insects or debris. If your home has combination storm windows and screens, check for smooth operation.

Check hinges, latches, locks and other hardware on doors and windows. Test them for smooth operation. Look for rust, corrosion or missing parts.

Foundation

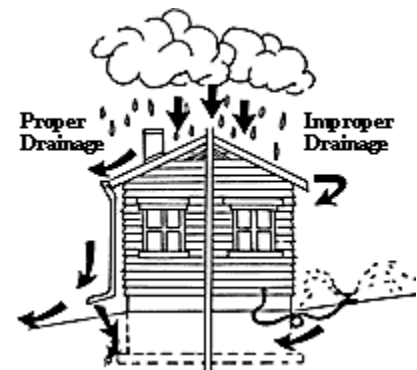
The greatest threats to the foundation of your home are termites and water. Yearly inspections can reduce the potential for problems.

Termites feed on wood. They must also have direct contact with the earth. Therefore, check all the wooden parts of the house on or near the ground. Look for signs of damage or deterioration of wood or the presence of earthen tubes (built by termites) along foundation walls or exposed pipes. In the spring or summer, watch for swarms of flying insects. For more information, see *G91-1062, Termites*.



Water damage can come from several sources, including improper site grading and drainage, damaged gutters and downspouts, soil, high water table, condensation, and failure of foundation waterproofing. The ground should slope away from the foundation. Downspouts should direct water away from the foundation. Ventilation and/or humidity control is necessary to reduce condensation.

Examine the foundation of your home inside and out. Look for water stains and damp spots. "Sniff" test for musty smells and the characteristic odor of mildew. Inspect cracks and note if they are large enough to allow moisture passage. Note the size of cracks, then check to see if they are growing or spreading over time.



If your home has a crawl space, it is a good idea to inspect it. Look for standing water. Check to see that insulation is in place and that vents are not blocked by debris.

Inspection Plan

A thorough inspection of the house structure is needed about once a year. Some people prefer the spring, to check for winter damage. Other people prefer the fall, to check for summer storm damage and to prepare for winter. If your home has particular trouble spots, you may need to check them several times a year.

In this publication we have dealt only with the house structure. However, there are other parts of the house that require inspection on a regular basis--heating and cooling systems, plumbing, electrical systems, and interior walls. You will want to include these inspections in your maintenance plan.

Maintenance Records

A permanent record of structural maintenance will make the job easier. A loose leaf or spiral notebook can be used. Divide the notebook into two or more sections.

Section 1 can be a yearly record of maintenance inspections. Include the date and a brief description of the condition of each part of the house. Note if you determined that repairs were needed.

Section 2 can be a record of repairs and maintenance that were done. Include the date, a description of the work, name of person or company doing the work, cost including materials, and guarantee information.

Additional sections of the notebook could include equipment purchase and repair, furniture purchase and repair, energy efficiency improvements, remodeling and redecorating, and damages covered by your homeowner's insurance.

RECORD OF HOUSE MAINTENANCE

Description of Work	Repairs By	Date	Cost
Termite Protection	Fly-by-nite ext. Co.	2-16-84	\$400.00
Exterior Painting	Chicken-Peel Painters	4-20-83	\$500.94
Faucet Washers	Lee Key Plumbers	4-22-84	\$20.00

If you have a home computer you can keep these records using a database or data management software package. There is some software on the market designed specifically for homeowner record keeping.

Resources

After you begin your maintenance program, you may find that you want to know more about your house's structure and the materials and equipment in it. You may want to learn to do more of your home repairs yourself. "Do-it-yourself" home maintenance and repairs are very popular right now. Your local library and favorite bookstore have many good references. Examples of popular books on home maintenance and repair include those by Time-Life Books, Better Homes and Gardens, and Reader's Digest. The following are just a few publications available from the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service to get you started.

- HEG 82-157, *Weatherizing Your Home: Caulking*
- HEG 82-158, *Weatherizing Your Home: Weatherstripping*

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C-1d, House Plans

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