

Ready for Winter?

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Thanksgiving is behind you and you've already made progress on your Christmas shopping. The first snow has fallen and you were ready. You blew out your sprinklers before the cold snap and maybe you even beat the rush to changeover your winter tires. You live in North Idaho and you know what it means to be ready for winter. You are "winter-savvy"

However, if you haven't yet prepared you're home for winter, don't put it off any longer. Here are **9 Helpful Hints for Winter Living in North Idaho**.

1. The "R-Factor"

R-Value is a rating given to products used to insulate your home. It is the measurement of *Resistance to Heat Flow*...thus the "R". The higher the *R-Value*, the better the resistance to heat flow. Insulation is a key element in making sure your home is ready for winter. Most homes in our area are built with R-19 insulation in the walls, floors and R-38 in the lids (contractor term for the ceiling). If the snow or frost is melting off your roof faster than the neighbors', it may be an indication of insufficient attic insulation. As a general rule, if you have less than 10" of blown cellulose insulation in your attic, you may benefit from additional insulation. I recommend contacting a local insulation professional to discuss your options.

2. Don't Be an Ice-Maker

Look in your crawlspace for any exposed waterlines. They may be made of copper or plastic. If you can see them, they should be insulated. Frozen water lines can cause pipes to burst, resulting in potential damage to your home. Foam insulation is available at your local hardware store...just make sure you know the pipe diameter you're covering.

3. Keep Warm Air Warm

Most homes in North Idaho have a forced air heating system. Locate your ductwork for this system in the attic or crawlspace. If you can see the metal ductwork, we recommend you consider insulating these ducts. Help your furnace out by reducing the heat loss as the warm air travels to its desired location.

4. Save \$100 Bucks

Before you pay your mechanical contractor \$100 to see why your furnace isn't heating properly, check your filter. Your furnace works full-time during the winter, while constantly filtering the air in your home. If the filter is dirty, your furnace will harder to "suck in" the cold air it's working to heat. Dirty filters reduce the performance of your furnace and drive up utility bills. I recommend purchasing a half dozen filters at a time and change them out once a month.

5. Slipping Through the Cracks

Cold outside air can work its way into your home through leaks you may have not already noticed. Some of the obvious places cold air slips by are exterior doors and windows. Feel around those locations to identify any obvious leakage. Often-overlooked electrical wall outlets can be a source for cold air flow, as well. A number of products are available to minimize this airflow, such as caulking, weather stripping, window and electrical outlet sealing kits.

6. Your Fan Club

If you have ceiling fans in your home, reverse the fans' direction. Most fans have a switch to change its rotation. When a fan is turning in a clockwise direction, it will push warm air down and help circulate the air.

7. Clean Out Rain Gutters

With this new snow, it may be a little late for this one. Remember to check your rain gutters for leaves or pine needles, which may have collected in your gutters this fall. Functioning gutters are important during the freeze/thaw cycles we can get during these winter days. Gutters help prevent "ice-damming," which can cause roof damage or leaks.

8. De-Ice or Not

Ever wondered why some concrete driveways look flaky? It's like the top cream of the concrete is brittle and breaking up. This may be a result of excessive de-icer usage. Manufacturers of de-icer products usually caution consumers to use it sparingly, clean off frequently and never use it on concrete less than a year old. If you choose to use de-icer on concrete, please read the manufacturer directions before use.

9. Crawlspace Vents...Open or Close?

This is a widely debated topic. Here are the facts about crawlspace vents. The concept behind the vents is to allow moisture vapor, which is naturally occurring in the ground, an avenue of escape. Trapped moisture in a crawlspace can provide an environment where molds and mildew can grow. You definitely don't want that! If your crawlspace has that musty smell, it may be an early sign of insufficient ventilation. As far as the winter months, some say open and some say close...I happen to agree with them.

Now you're ready for winter. Please drive carefully and have a very Merry Christmas!



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