

Daily Union Article

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Title: Preparing Homes for Winter Weather

The crisp mornings of fall are upon us and the official start of winter, December 21, 2018, is little more than a month away. Is your home ready for winter? Are you? There's no time like the present as fall is the perfect time to get ready for winter. Not only can you reduce the risk of a house fire by being diligent about preparing your home for winter, you can also keep the environment in your home healthy!

Here is a checklist to help you organize and complete your home winterization efforts:

Home Safety

- Check smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Make sure the batteries have been replaced and use the "test" button on them to ensure the alarm still works.
- Check your home heating equipment. Chimneys and flues must be clean and operating properly to reduce the risk of fire. If you use a wood burning stove, follow the manufacturer's maintenance guidelines. Use a wire brush to clean your stovepipe and chimney at least once a year. Use the proper fuel such as hardwoods like maple, ash, hickory or oak.

Home Maintenance

- Repair any broken or cracked glass in your windows so that heat does not escape in cold months. Look for places where air can seep in such as around door frames. Use weather stripping to ensure the door is sealed when it shuts.
- Clean and tune furnaces, boilers and hot water heaters, checking for leaks or sweating. Have a technician come in each fall for an annual furnace check-up. The technician will check all the elements of the unit to make sure they are running efficiently. If your furnace is under warranty, failure to have this annual equipment maintenance could void the system's warranty.
- Change filters often. Because each household is unique in the amount of particles that get stirred up, you should take a look at your filter every month. As a general rule, replace the filter on your furnace every month if using lower quality filters and every 2-3 months for higher quality air filters (see insert). If you have pets or if someone in your house smokes, the air environment of your home and efficiency of your furnace would benefit from monthly filter changes.
- Check your attic's insulation, ensuring it is in place and secure. If necessary, you may need to add additional insulation. Other places you might want to check your insulation is in walls, basements, and crawlspaces. Batt and roll insulation works well in these spaces and is a relatively easy weekend do-it-yourself project.
- Consider installing appliance timers to cut your winter energy costs. Timers can be set at lower temperatures so that the furnace runs less often during the daytime hours while no one is home, while being set for higher temperature when at home.

- Clean gutters and downspouts. The fall weather brings with it falling leaves. These leaves, along with small twigs, old seedlings, buds, nests, and debris can easily plug up your gutters

and downspouts. This will prevent them from doing their task – moving water from rain and snow away from the home.

- Drain outdoor faucets and hoses. This is more important than you may realize. Water expands with it freezes. Ice needs approximately 10% more space than the water it originates from. Outdoor faucets left with water in them during the winter months will freeze. Because of the expansion ice creates, either the pipe, valves, or joints (or all three) will break. Hoses need drained for the same reason outdoor faucets do – they will break when they freeze. Disconnect your outdoor hoses, drain them, and hang them up for the winter. They will last longer, be protected from the winter elements and will be less likely to leak at the connectors the next time you use them.

Keeping your home environment safe and warm all winter long will lead to better overall health. It will also lead to much more enjoyable holiday breaks and festivities. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

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Which Air Filter is Best?

Air filters can range in thickness from 1" to as much as 5". According to Consumer Reports, testing shows that the thicker the filter, the better the filter works and the longer you can wait between replacing them (3 months maximum.) It is important to note that each heating system offers manufacturing recommendations regarding the size of the filter. If these recommendations allow for a range, then choose a thicker filter within the range for healthier air circulation in your home. If your furnace isn't equipped to handle a thicker filter, it will need to be modified by a licensed HVAC professional.

What Does *THAT* Mean?

MERV – This term identifies that a whole house filter has been scored with a **minimum efficiency reporting value**. This system was developed by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers. The higher the number, the better the quality of air filtration provided. For best results, look for filters with a MERV rating of 10 or above.

MPR – This term stands for **Micro-Particle Performance Rating**. Developed by the 3M Company, it rates the filters on the ability to capture airborne particles smaller than 1 micron. The best filters have MPR ratings ranging from 1500-1900.

FPR – Another rating system, developed by Home Depot, ranks filters on a scale from 1 to 10. Those filters with the higher **Filter Performance Rating** perform better than those with a lower number score.

HEPA – A **High-Efficiency Particulate-Arresting** filter can reduce the amount of dust that is blown through the heating system. HEPA air filters have been known to help people with asthma or other chronic lung diseases, but research doesn't support that other people need such filtration.