

The Dearborn-Buckingham Group

Welcome

You have recently made a very important decision. Your new home is a significant investment monetarily as well as emotionally. Our goal at the Dearborn-Buckingham Group, Inc. is to have provided you with an experience that both met your needs as well as exceeded your expectations. Your family's well-being will be rewarded with a home you are proud to own and we hope to provide such a home. We understand the importance of genuinely caring for your needs.

Now that your home is complete there are some general maintenance items that should be done to preserve its value to you. We at Dearborn-Buckingham Group are proud of your home and the neighborhood in which it resides. In order to help you preserve your neighborhood's allure there are some periodic maintenance and common repairs that you will need to be aware of during your ownership. With the proper care for your home it will become a greater asset to you and something you can enjoy for years to come.

This periodic maintenance is necessary for a variety of reasons. These include normal wear and tear, inherent distinctiveness of the materials used, seasonal variances such as temperature and humidity; and also normal services on mechanical systems within your home.

In many circumstances periodic maintenance prevents more costly issues from arising. When these routine services are not addressed in a timely way they create more involved, time consuming problems. In some cases if these routine repairs are not done it can void any applicable warranties that may have otherwise applied.

Basic Home Tools

- Safety goggles
- Rubber gloves
- Cordless drill

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- Wire Brush
- Putty Knife
- Sanding block
- Paint brush
- Screwdrivers
- Pliers
- Channel lock pliers
- Adjustable crescent wrenches (large and small)
- Plunger
- Flashlight
- Hammer
- Tape Measure
- Level
- Square
- Utility knife
- Caulk gun
- Vacuum cleaner

Basic Accessories

- Duct tape
- Terry clothe towels
- Sponges
- Brushes
- Assorted Nails
- Assorted Screws (wood and metal)
- Drill bits
- Glue
- Caulk (latex and silicone)
- Silicone lubricant

After Move-In Checklist

- Apply silicone based grout sealer to ceramic tile grout.
- Purchase a general purpose fire extinguisher for each floor of your home and an additional one for potential grease fires in the kitchen. Demonstrate proper usage to your family in the event of an emergency.
- Have available a First Aid Kit in an accessible location.

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- Attach furniture protectors to the bottoms of furniture legs to protect hardwood, resilient, and ceramic floors.
- Locate your main water line shut-off valve and show it to your family members in the event of an emergency.
- Check for erosion after first heavy rainfall. Make certain splash blocks are placed so water is flowing away from the foundation.

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Air Conditioning

Air conditioning, along with Heating and Ventilation, make up the HVAC system. The HVAC system is also referred to as the “comfort system” as well. You’re A/C unit has been sized to comply with the latest requirements and will be most efficient for your size home. The purpose of air conditioning is to provide a comfortable interior atmosphere regardless of climate or weather conditions, especially when the mercury soars. You’re A/C system is not limited to the HVAC unit however. Window treatments should also be considered when thinking of maintaining a stable inside environment. With the proper window coverings you can keep an even temperature more efficiently saving yourself money.

Your air conditioner, like all others, operates by a fan pulling warm indoor air across cool coils that contain refrigerant. The refrigerant absorbs the heat and exhausts that heat through the outdoor unit. The cooled air is then pumped throughout the house and blown into each room. To sustain the cool air in rooms with windows, drapes made of fabric or wood are acceptable; we recommend lined drapes or multi-cell pleated shades. The use of mini blinds adds heat in the home. The mini blinds absorb the solar rays and convert them into radiated heat within the room.

Maintenance

Since your A/C is just one element in the HVAC unit most of the maintenance is associated with the Furnace maintenance; please review that section as well. The maintenance that pertains to your air conditioning includes the following: change furnace filter once a month and clean the outdoor unit three times a year.

To clean, power the outdoor unit off by shutting it off at the thermostat and by switching the A/C breaker off either at the unit shut off box or at the main electrical panel in the basement. Once the unit is off, hose down the unit making sure all parts are clear of any residue build up; pay particular attention to the coils surrounding the unit as any residue will severely reduce the unit’s efficiency.

It is also recommended that you verify there are no clogs in the condensation line. On your furnace there is a condensate line that extends to a nearby floor drain. If you have trouble locating the drain line please refer to your unit’s manufacturer manual and warranty information.

Early in the spring season before the use of your air conditioning is necessary we recommend testing its operation. Set the thermostat several degrees lower than the actual temperature. This difference will allow you to feel cooler air distribute through the vents. If any problems present themselves, such as no cool air, then you can have them solved before the hot weather season begins.

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Besides these maintenance tasks it is recommended you have a licensed air conditioning professional service your unit every year. Although you may not need to have your unit serviced each year savings will come through the energy efficient unit and longer life performance.

Air balance, or air flow control, can be adjusted to any part to your home. With changes in the seasons and exposure to the sun you find that some rooms may be warmer or cooler than the others. This can be adjusted by regulating the air flow at each individual grill vent. Also, in the basement there are dampers on the ducts that can be adjusted to restrict or permit air flow to particular areas. Each of these dampers is labeled to help in this process. Within the first year it is anticipated that your home may need “balancing” and shall be provided by an HVAC professional at no cost to you.

For optimal performance from your A/C keep the doors to all rooms open or partially open. This will allow air to leave the rooms and circulate throughout the system. Good airflow means temperatures can be maintained and it will permit the air to be filtered better as well. It is typical however for temperatures to vary by three degrees from room to room.

Alarm System

If your home selections included pre-wiring for an alarm system you shall arrange for the final connection after your closing. The alarm company will demonstrate the systems operation and instruct you in its use. We recommend that you test the system regularly per your alarm company’s protocol.

Appliances

Read and follow all manufacturer requirements for the use and maintenance of each appliance in your home. Keep all appliance manuals and warranty information available for reference. It is suggested that you register all appliances by filling out the registration cards and mailing them directly to the manufacturer. The appliances are warranted directly to you in accordance with the terms and conditions supplied by the manufacturer, and in some cases may not be warranted unless said warranty cards are sent back to the manufacturer.

Manufacturer’s Service

If a problem arises with an appliance, call the customer service number listed in the manufacturer’s warranty. When contacting the appliance manufacturer regarding warranty items, be prepared to supply the following information:

- Date of purchase (your closing date)
- Serial and model numbers (found on the side or bottom of appliance)
- Description of the problem

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Attic Access

Your attic was not designed as a storage area. The roof trusses are not intended to support additional weight from stored materials. The attic access is provided as access to your roof area and mechanical systems.

We have provided numerous roof vents in this space that provide ventilation through the roof. These remove excess heat and moisture from the attic space. Do not cover these vents with insulation or any other material.

Whenever performing any tasks in the attic practice extreme caution. Do not step off wood members and onto the drywall. Force placed onto the drywall in between wood members can result in physical injury and will result in damage to the ceiling below. Also, when working in the attic ensure you have foot protection. If not careful you may step on sharp metal. Never traverse the attic space without shoes.

Be sure to reposition the fiberglass insulation pad on the access panel when closing. Insulation in the attic protects the room below it. Any movement in the insulation may leave gaps that reduce the insulation's effectiveness. Always move insulation that is disturbed to its original location.

Brick

Brick is one of the most durable and near-maintenance free exteriors for a home. Brick has a sharp appeal and weathers well with time. With this said little really needs to be done to keep its attractiveness.

Maintenance

Tuck-pointing is something that may need to be done after several years. Face brick may require repairing of mortar between bricks that may have chipped and/or cracked away.

Cabinets

All cabinets in your home have been selected for their attractiveness, durability, and ease of care whether they are in the kitchen or bathrooms. With proper care and maintenance these cabinets will retain their appeal and remain serviceable for years to come.

Wood cabinet tone, grain, and color variations are normal characteristics of real wood. These variations reflect the wood's distinctiveness and are unavoidable.

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Maintenance

Clean wood cabinets as you would any fine wood furniture, with gentle care. It is recommended that you use cleaning products on your cabinets a couple of times a year but no more than once every couple of months. Products such as lemon oil, Liquid Gold, and Old English with scratch cover are suggested for wood finish care. Follow directions of application on the container. Avoid paraffin-based spray waxes or washing wood cabinets with water; both will damage the sheen of the cabinet's finish.

Space-saving coffee makers that mount under cabinets are discouraged. When in use the steam rising from the coffee maker will damage solid wood or wood veneer, causing fading or delamination. It is suggested, for the same reason, that when regular coffee makers are in use that they not be positioned under the cabinets. Pull the coffee maker out and toward the front of the counter.

Check the hinges at least once a year for accurate alignment and proper tightness. If adjustment is necessary, hand-tighten with a screwdriver so as not to strip out the wood. Check the drawers at the same time for easy movement. If hinges or drawer glides seem sluggish use a small amount of silicone lubricant to improve the glide.

Should nicks or scratches appear on your wood cabinets or drawers, repair with color matching wood putty. Hardware stores stock colored putty, stains, and polymer fillers to cover and repair damage.

Carpentry and Framing

The framing of the home, or rough carpentry, acts as the skeletal structure. This portion of the home includes the manufacture of wood sections of the floor systems, exterior walls, interior partitions and roof; all of which are built on and supported by the foundation.

The exterior walls are designed and built in the framing stage to support the vertical load from the floors and roof while also resisting lateral loads produced by winds. Interior walls, or partition walls, may or may not be load bearing. The roof is designed to support not only its own weight but also the anticipated loads generated by snow, ice, and wind. The framing is quality controlled by The Dearborn Buckingham Group, Inc. and local building codes.

Carpet

Refer to the manufacturer's recommendations for information on the care of your floor coverings.

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Maintenance

You can sustain the upright position of the carpet nap, even in high traffic areas, with daily vacuuming. Carpets wear out because of regular foot traffic and imbedded dirt particles. If dirt particles get beyond the suction of the vacuum then they begin to wear down and dull the carpet. To maintain your carpet the best thing you can do is also the easiest thing to do; vacuum frequently.

Spills should be wiped up immediately. Dab or blot at the stain to spot clean; never rub at the stain. Any stain removers should be tested on a sample piece or an area of the carpet, such as a closet, before using on a stain; doing this will reveal any undesirable effects the chemicals may have on your carpet. You should plan for a professional cleaning to be performed annually.

High traffic areas are susceptible to “crushing” or matting of the carpet’s pile fibers. Possible remedies to this affect are frequent vacuuming and placing glides under heavy furniture. Also rotating your furniture in a way that changes the traffic pattern will promote a more even wear of your carpet. Some areas that are prone to matting are hallways and stairs; little can be done to alter this and is considered normal wear.

Caulking

Caulk tends to shrink and dry out over time. This weathered caulking will no longer perform well enough to seal against moisture and air infiltration. All areas that have been caulked should be checked with regularity. Touching up these caulked locations is a part of routine maintenance and is relatively easy to do. Caulking compounds and the necessary dispensers (caulk guns) are available at hardware stores. Check with the manufacturers’ instructions to select the correct caulk for each application. There are several general types of caulk:

Latex: Latex caulk is appropriate for areas that require painting, such as the stair stringer or where the countertop backsplash and the wall meet.

Silicone: Caulk that contains silicone will prohibit paint. This type of caulk works best where water is present. For example, where the tub meets tile or a sink meets the countertop.

Colored Caulk: Colored caulk has dye added to it in order to look less conspicuous when applied. These types of caulks can be found where larger selections are available.

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Ceramic Tile

Ceramic tiles are the easiest coverings to care for; they are used in numerous situations. In your case it is used as flooring, however, these techniques can be used on any tile application. Ceramic tiles are very resilient, capable of lasting the life of the home. Little is required to keep up the tiles but the grout entails more maintenance. The grout is the cement-like mix that fills the gaps between tiles.

To care for your ceramic tile avoid use of any abrasive cleaners. Cleaners that contain abrasive compounds literally sand off the finish on your tile and leave it looking dull. Check the labels of the products you plan to use – you may be surprised how many actually contain abrasives.

For larger debris that may accumulate on the ceramic tile use a vacuum. To further clean the tiles use a wet mop with warm water; you may mix with non-abrasive detergents for thorough cleanings. To ensure no residue build up manifests upon the grout or tile use detergents sparingly and rinse well.

Maintenance

The best way to maintain your grout is to seal it before any spills occur. With the grout being brand new upon moving into your home allow the grout to fully cure for the next several months. After this time it is advisable to take the time to seal it with a silicone base sealer. Follow the manufacturer's directions. Be advised that sealing your grout is a general maintenance item and should be done as necessary.

If your grout becomes discolored or “grubby” you can clean it with some readily available items. You will need a brass or fiber brush, cleanser and water. The cleansers are available at most hardware stores. Another method is using vinegar, hydrogen peroxide and water. Mix one part vinegar and one part water. Apply the blend with the brush and start scrubbing the grout. It may take a while because vinegar is a weak acid but helps remove stains. If that solution does not work well, do the same thing with hydrogen peroxide. Allow the peroxide to sit for a few moments so it can whiten and dislodge any stains. Then scrub the grout and wipe up the residue.

Grout will begin to separate over time. Separations allow water to leak underneath where wood rot can take place. Especially areas subjected to moisture, like the bathroom, grout and caulk can begin to shrink. Cracks in the grout can be filled using premix. Premix grout can be purchased at most large sized home centers or tile stores. Follow all directions on the packaging. This sort of maintenance is necessary to protect the underlayment from water damage.

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Concrete and Flatwork

Concrete is installed in places where heavy traffic and/or loads are placed. In some cases stone or brick are used in lieu of concrete; because of the similar composition, maintenance on one can sometimes be used on another. It is worth noting that most concrete cracks are created by some sort of ground movement.

Often severe cracks are created in concrete or flatwork because of a shift in the soil. This shift can be caused by excessive water that has found its way beside or below the concrete path, pad or foundation. This build up of moisture causes the soil to expand and crack the concrete. In these cases, patching will only work in conjunction with correcting the underlying drainage issue as well.

The walls of your foundation are composed of poured concrete with steel rebar, or reinforcing rods. Despite the care with which your foundation was formed cracks can still arise in various places. Unless water seepage works its way through such a crack, it is most commonly a surface crack and will not undermine the structural integrity of your home.

Maintenance

Cracks may form in concrete even though we have used generally accepted construction procedures for the installation of the concrete or flatwork. Some sort of cracking presents itself in nearly all homes. The severity of the crack is the question. When no water leaks through the crack then it can be repaired with a concrete caulk or perhaps hydraulic cement. If water does leak through the crack a professional should investigate the origin and repair as needed.

To proactively prevent cracking in the foundation of your home, maintain positive drainage away from your home. Ensuring drainage away from the building or any concrete slab will minimize your risk exposure to movement in the soil and cracking in the concrete. Check to see if your gutter downspouts are discharging near the foundation. You should have splash blocks that direct the water away from the building before entering the ground.

Minor cracks in concrete slabs ought to be sealed with a waterproof concrete caulk in order to prevent water penetration to the soil beneath. Again if moisture builds up under the concrete slab it is highly susceptible, during the winter months, to frost and freezing that leads to lifting and creating a larger crack.

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To further protect your concrete you may want to consider a sealer. Concrete is actually a porous material and acts similar to a sponge. Although rarer than other sources of cracking, wet concrete that freezes can crack; or more commonly spall and chip. This situation can be minimized by periodically sealing your concrete with an acrylic or silicone based sealer. Not only will the sealer protect the concrete from water but also the harsh affects of the rock salt used to melt snow. Remove ice, snow and salt accumulation as soon as possible when snowstorms have passed. Be advised that salt application is not recommended during the first year of purchase. This is due to the time it takes for concrete to fully cure.

To clean your porches, steps, patios, etc. it is recommended that you not use cold water when temperatures are high. When the sun has been shining on the concrete it raises the temperature of the slab and along with the abrupt change from cold water can damage the surface bond. It is suggested that sweeping be the primary method of keeping exterior concrete clean. Only wash when temperatures are moderate.

Condensation

Condensation within the interior of the home is the result of high humidity inside and low outside temperatures. Condensation around windows in particular can occur when a window leaks air. The mixture of cold inside air and warm outside air creates a wet layer over the window; which may drip down to the sills and frames around the window. If not taken care of this moisture accumulation may cause wood to rot or mildew to grow.

To remedy this situation you should look to see if any air leaks exist and seal them. Typical solutions to air leaks around windows include replacing weather stripping, caulking around the inside and outside frame, or inserting foam sealant in any gaps. Common places these leaks may occur are where one section of the window meets another, where the frame and window meet, or where the frame meets the wall. To check if a leak really exists, hold a lighted candle near all the aforementioned areas. If the candle flickers you have a leak.

Other than air infiltrating the home, ventilation will be the next means to reducing condensation. The idea will be to exchange dry, cool air for warm, humid interior air. These include, but are not limited to:

- While showering, shut the bathroom door and run the exhaust fan.
- Refrain from hanging clothes within the home to dry during cold weather.
- Make sure the clothes dryer is venting outside.
- Turn off any humidifier devices.
- If your home has a fireplace, open the flue occasionally to permit moisture to escape.

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- Allow air to circulate within the home. Make certain all air registers are unobstructed. Leave all drapes open to allow the air to flow over windows.
- Keep all rooms heated above 50 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Run exhaust fans when washing or mopping floors, the increase in moisture will contribute to condensation.
- Make sure the intake damper on your cold air return duct is free of obstructions.
- Check to see if vents within the attic are blocked by insulation or debris. Ridge vents may be blocked by snow where warm air escapes. Eave vents may be blocked by insulation where cooler air enters.

Besides solving condensation issues these suggestions will help save you from excessive energy loss and in turn cost.

Countertops

Your countertops are fairly easy to maintain. The most important way to protect their beauty and ensure their longevity is to never cut directly on them. Always use a cutting board to protect the surface. Also, shield the countertop surface from any extreme heat, like pans taken off the stove. A general rule here is if you cannot hold it in your hand; do not place it directly upon the countertop.

To clean the countertop surface all you need, in most cases, is water with mild soap (no abrasive cleaners). This excludes common products like Ajax, Comet, and Soft Scrub. For laminate tops the proceeding instructions are typically sufficient. Extra care should be taken, however, to ensure you do not flood the laminate top with water. Excess water, especially at the seams, can penetrate and cause the substrate to swell. For more stubborn messes you may also use a nylon brush. Be sure to wipe the surface dry once complete. By scrubbing the countertop with the water/soap mix your countertop will gleam. To further maintain your newly super clean countertop you can even consider waxing the surface.

For stone surfaces much of the same methods for care apply as it does to laminate tops. One additional step that should be taken is to seal the stone. Stone sealant can be found at most home centers or the manufacturer of your countertop. The use of sealant helps maintain the luster and finish as well as assists in day to day clean-up. It is recommended that your stone surface be sealed twice a year. Follow the directions on the sealer to apply correctly.

Both Corian and Quartz countertops are non-porous by nature and durable. Corian is resistant to scratching, staining, and even chipping and breakings, however, they are not indestructible. They require the same attention as other tops as it pertains to avoiding placement of hot objects or cutting directly on top of the counter. A mild abrasive is permissible on a Corian top as well as a Scotch-brite scrubbing pad for tough spills. Similarly, Quartz is easy to maintain since it is an engineered product and durable.

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Doors

Doors, along with windows, are the most important element of a home; they permit access to the home or outdoors. Doors are used most frequently and because of that they require maintenance. Doors consist of moving parts that suffer from wear and tear. For a significant amount of issues with doors all that is needed is silicone lubricant. For example, silicone or graphite works well on squeaky hinges. Also, if the bi-fold doors begin to stick silicone lubricant applied to the track may eliminate the problem.

Doors found throughout your home are wood products. Wood is subject to the natural characteristics such as warping and shrinkage. With fluctuations in humidity from furnaces, showers, dishwashers and the like, your doors may require adjustments from time to time. Some of the mitered joints may even develop minor separations. To deal with these separations wood putty or caulk should be used. Once the hole is filled, some paint should be applied.

A door that may be sticking or slightly warping is usually due to high humidity. Major adjustments are discouraged during damp seasons unless the problem persists after the weather changes. Check the screws in the door and tighten those in the jambs and door frame. Try applying a wax or paraffin to the sticking surface. If that doesn't remedy the situation, look to plane out the door with sandpaper. Be sure to repaint any part of the door that is sanded. It is important to seal out the moisture with either paint or stain when finished.

Driveways

Most driveways are asphalt surfaces. It is durable and requires little maintenance. Concrete driveways are an option and maintenance is the same as what is specified in the "Concrete Flatwork" section. New asphalt driveways may appear rough in texture; this is normal. Likewise, asphalt is a pliable material and with affects of weather and earth movement, some settling and cracking may occur. These are typical characteristics of asphalt.

During high temperatures the asphalt is most malleable; so care should be taken to ensure no concentrated or prolonged loads remain on your driveway. During this weather depressions and punctures may be created on your driveway's surface. If concentrated loads are unavoidable then the use of plywood or like material should be used to spread the load over a greater amount of surface area.

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Maintenance

If spills should occur on your asphalt driveway attention should be paid immediately. Action is most crucial if the spill is a petroleum product; such as, gasoline, oil or turpentine. These materials will dissolve and damage the driveway. Washing the surface with soap and water will work. Thoroughly rinse the area when the wash is complete.

Seal-coating your driveway is normal maintenance and should be done to prolong the surface's functionality and appearance. The frequency of seal-coating your driveway is largely dependent upon weather conditions and how your driveway has worn. You will notice that the driveway fades and the surface gravel may become more visible. This is usually done every (12) months.

Drywall

Drywall is both easy to damage and easy to repair. When damage occurs to your drywall you need not worry about the structural integrity of your home; drywall is purely cosmetic. Drywall acquires two kinds of damage: gouges and hairline cracks. Gouges can be deterred with care when maneuvering furniture. Hairline cracks, however, can not be deterred. These are usually caused by movement in the foundation or framing of the home. Shifting in the framing of your home is caused by expansion and contraction from temperature and humidity changes.

Maintenance

Small cracks and small nail holes are easiest to repair. For dealing with these issues silicone caulk works best. Silicone will flex as the crack changes shape with normal movement. You can also fill a crack with drywall joint compound or spackle however it is prone to cracking. The spackle hardens yet remains brittle; so the silicone caulk method is more durable.

When you purchase silicone caulk for this purpose make sure the caulk you buy is paintable. Also get a caulking gun for the size tube you plan to use. Dispense the caulk in a thin bead into the crack or hole with the caulk gun. Wipe away the excess from around the crack immediately with a damp sponge. Allow sufficient time to allow the caulk to dry and coat once with primer. Finally, apply paint.

For large cracks and holes drywall compound (spackle) should be used. Begin by cleaning the crack or hole of debris. Apply a light coating of spackle to the crack. Smooth over with a small knife (6") so as no excess is left around the sides of the crack. Let dry, it should only take a few minutes if a thin coat has been applied.

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Using a wider knife (10") apply another smooth coat; make sure to feather the edges. Allow the second coat to completely dry, typically a few hours. Lightly sand down some excess buildup with fine grit sandpaper or sanding blocks. Now apply the third coat, probably the final coat. Again allow it to fully dry. Sand the patch carefully, paying attention to the edges. Sand until smooth and almost unnoticeable by feel. Apply primer and once dry paint to match the wall. Done!

Nail pops are bumps that appear within the drywall. They occur when the nails or screws work loose. These are common and can be fixed. Begin by driving (2) new drywall screws into the stud on either side of the pop. This will pull the drywall tight to the stud. Be sure to stop the screw when it is just below the surface of the drywall causing a dimple. With a nail set and hammer, drive the nail pop further into the stud or if it is a screw use a screw gun. Once the nails and screws are all situated so that they recess into the surface of the drywall, follow the previous directions for patching with spackle.

Electrical System

It is important to know the location of your master circuit breaker panel. Typically you will find them on an exterior wall within the basement. Be sure to locate where yours resides.

This panel includes a main shut-off that controls the electrical power to your home. Also, this panel contains individual circuit breakers that control separate circuits. Each breaker is marked to help identify which breaker is connected to which area of the home. If ever an electrical failure occurs in your home, check the breakers in this panel for any that may need to be reset.

Your circuit breakers have three positions: on, off and tripped. To reset a tripped breaker first switch the breaker completely off. Once the breaker is in the off position it can be switched back to the on position. This should restore power. If the breaker immediately trips again then a larger issue remains. In the event that this happens please consult an electrician.

The reason breakers trip is often because the circuit is overloaded. This occurs when too many appliances are plugged into it, a defective or worn cord is in use, or an appliance running on that circuit pulling too high of voltage. A good measure for whether or not you are overloading your circuit is to unplug everything and reset the breaker. If it trips then it is something more serious than an overloaded circuit. However, if the breaker remains on then the culprit is likely an unplugged item that is defective.

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters, or more commonly referred to as a GFCI, are circuit breakers designed to save peoples lives. Regular breakers are designed to protect property while the GFCI prevents electrical shock.

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The GFCI detects when a short or ground fault occurs and trips in one-fortieth of a second. Any variation in the current triggers the GFCI to pop in order to prevent the current from creating a shock hazard. These are sensitive breakers and heavy appliances such as freezers, power tools or electric motors should not be connected.

You should see a GFCI receptacle installed within 4 feet of water exposures. These may include a sink, exterior or garage receptacles, and fixtures and receptacles near showers or tubs.

Your home's GFCIs should be tested monthly. This is done by press the "TEST" button. If the GFCI trips, then reset it by pressing in the "RESET" button; however, if it does not trip then replace it immediately.

All modifications or additions to your electrical system should be done by a professional.

Fireplace

Fireplaces are nice accents that bring warm and cozy images to the idea of home and holidays. Having a wood burning fire, under control, in your home does not come without risks and responsibilities. Without proper knowledge and precautions there are potential dangers that exist with the use of your fireplace.

Fireplaces are not efficient sources of heat. They do not compare to the elaborate HVAC systems designed to heat your home. Fireplaces are beautiful features added to a home and ought to be thought of as a luxury, adding to the home's atmosphere. It is approximated that only ten percent of the heat generated by the fire burning is radiated into the house.

Chimney fires will occur if fireplaces are used yet not maintained. These fires can occur when creosote, combustible deposits, builds up on the inner walls. The risk is great when the creosote is coating the chimney 1/8 to 1/4 inch thick. It is safe to say a chimney fire will not remain isolated; it will turn into a house fire causing serious damage.

To reduce this risk a professional service should be contacted once a year to inspect your chimney. The exact frequency your fireplace needs to be cleaned will depend upon the type of firewood you burn. Hardwood is better for you chimney than softwoods. Mixed hardwoods like oak, hickory, ash, cherry, and hard maple are woods that burn cleaner, longer and with less creosote buildup. Avoid the softer woods such as willow, poplar, pine, and cedar. If your fireplace is non wood burning then the frequency with which you need to clean your chimney is less.

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When the fireplace is in use you must open the damper and cold air vent if your model has one. Conversely, when not in use these both should be closed to conserve heat. Be sure the fire is out before you close these vents, otherwise the smoke will back up into the house.

It is essential that you read all the manufacturer's instructions and warnings before operation of the fireplace.

Foundation

The home's infrastructure relies on the foundation. The foundation supports and transfers the weight or load of the home to the soil. Proper care of the foundation will ensure your basement remains dry, floors level, along with keeping windows and doors operating smoothly.

Surrounding soils and moisture levels play an integral role on the foundation's strength and integrity. Cracks and leaks in the foundation are usually caused by swelling and shrinking soils around the building. This was discussed at length in the section "Concrete and Flatwork," please review that section.

It is important not to change the grade around your home. Maintain proper sloping away from the foundation. If there are swales on the sides of your home, ensure that these troughs/ditches are directing water away from the foundation as well.

If animals such as pets dig a hole near the foundation, be sure to fill it before any rainfall. Water can pool up around the foundation as a result of these holes. If animals continue to dig around your foundation, seek a product to deter such behavior.

Garage Overhead Door

The garage door is the largest moving object in your home; because of this fact maintenance is required for safe and reliable operation.

It is important that no one is allowed near the door when it is moving unless they are aware of the safety concerns. Keep hands and fingers away from all parts of the door other than the handle. Children should not be permitted to operate or play near the garage door.

Adjustments to the garage door should be done by a qualified person. The springs used in the doors operation are under a large amount of tension. To adjust these springs a trained professional will use special tools for safe servicing.

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Maintenance

Use 30 weight oil every 6 months to lube all the garage door's moving parts. These parts include: track, rollers, hinges, pulleys and springs. Also at this time it is recommended you check all hardware and tighten as necessary.

Gas Shut-Off

Gas shut-offs are valves on the gas line. You will find these near any gas line connection to an item that operates on gas. There is also a main gas shut-off at the gas meter. It is important to know the location of your main gas shut-off in case of any emergencies that may arise; its location will/has been illustrated during your New Home Orientation. The gas shut-off valves are generally "ball" type valves and are open when the handle is parallel, or in-line, with the gas line; conversely, it is closed when the handle is perpendicular with the gas line.

Natural gas is the most potentially dangerous part of your home. It is important that caution is used in monitoring and maintaining your gas lines. If ever you suspect a gas leak, leave the home immediately without turning on or off any electrical devices and call the gas company as well as the fire department. Even turning off electrical devices or switches can cause a spark enough to ignite natural gas.

Grading and Drainage

The area around your home was inspected and approved for proper drainage. This grading around your home is important to keep the basement dry during wet seasons and is considered at length by several parties. The construction superintendent works with the surveyor and local building authorities to ensure drainage away from the foundation as well as the entire lot.

If you install or change any landscaping, make certain the original grade is maintained. It is important, especially within 2 feet of the foundation wall, that the ground slopes at a minimum of ¼" every foot away from the structure.

Do not remove splash blocks from under the gutter downspouts. Splash blocks or downspout extensions are needed to move water away from the structure and prevents erosion.

Settling is common around the perimeter of the foundation. This typically happens because after the foundation has been formed, inspected and approved it is backfilled. The backfill soil is not at its original density. With heavy rainfall or the melting of snow the soil begins to re-compact itself. This settling should be built up again to original grade before additional precipitation occurs, to reduce potential problems.

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Gutters and Downspouts

Gutters serve a greater purpose than just a decorative component to the roofline of your home. Gutters collect the vast amounts of rain water that runs off your roof. If your roof was without gutters, water would accumulate at the foundation. The constant runoff at the foundation would create erosion and a pooling effect would occur. As was discussed before, collection of water near the foundation will lead to leaks or flooding of the basement.

This same problem can occur if your gutters are not free from obstruction. Debris can fill your downspouts or gutters and cause water to backup and spill over the sides. This needs to be addressed immediately if this happens.

Downspouts direct water a safe distance from the structure. The idea is to move all water as far away from the home as possible to eliminate the risk of water seepage. We supply splash blocks to achieve this. One thing you may want to do to further protect your home is to install a drainpipe to capture the water and move it a safe distance away from the foundation.

Hardwood Floors

Hardwood floors provide a beautiful and elegant surface. This type of floor is also the easiest to keep clean and maintain.

The most work involved with finished hardwood floors is preventive measures. Begin by using walk-off mats or rugs at all exterior doors. This will prevent dirt and rough sand-like material from finding its way onto your floor.

Maintenance

To maintain the attractive look your hardwood floor has follow these recommendations:

- Vacuum often; eliminate abrasive dirt.
- Provide rugs at high-spill locations within the kitchen; such as the stove, sink and refrigerator. Be conscious that mats/rugs with rubber backings may cause yellowing or warping of the wood surface.
- When spills occur on the wood floor, wipe them up immediately then dry.
- Install window treatments to reduce ultraviolet light exposure that may damage the wood.

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- Outfit the legs of your furniture with fabric glides to prevent scratching when the furniture is moved.
- When mopping your wood floors use little water.

Hardwood floors respond to changes in humidity. Excessive water when mopping can cause the wood to expand and can damage the floor. When damp mopping, remove all excess water from the floor immediately.

Heating System

The forced-air heating system that has been installed in your home has been sized to properly supply comfort for years to come. This system, like nearly all elements within your home, needs to be maintained to ensure longevity. One thing you should plan on doing is having a professional heating contractor inspect and service your system every year, before the heating season begins. This will cost around \$75. This is more of an investment than an expense since your system will operate more efficiently and will be safer as well.

Common problems that may be overlooked if this simple procedure is not followed are as follows. Dirty, inefficient furnace may waste fuel and cost you up to ten times more than a furnace running at its prime. A potentially deadly problem can occur if a cracked heat exchanger or dislodged flue fills your home with carbon monoxide. These types of evils are sought after during annual service and inspections.

Maintenance

A general task that should be done by the homeowner with regularity is the changing of the furnace filter. This is a simple and important task to execute. It is recommended this be done once a month year round. It may seem overkill to change it so frequently but the amount of airborne debris it collects is incredible. The typical filter picks up dust, pollen, pet dander, and dirt from the air in the home. If the filter is not changed on a regular basis then the furnace works harder and less efficiently.

We recommend you purchase your filters by the case. This will help to remind you to change the filters habitually. When you buy them in bulk you will also receive a price break.

You may need to reference your furnace's manual for the exact location of where you insert the filters. Generally, the filter location is between the cold-air return duct and the furnace, near the blower chamber. To change the furnace filter simply pull out the old one and slide in the new. Make certain the airflow arrow on the filter points away from the cold-air return and into the blower chamber. If outfitted with an electronic air cleaner, clean parts monthly. Refer to the manufacturer's manual for instructions.

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Another simple task the homeowner should consider is cleaning the blower compartment. This can be done at the same time the filters are changed for convenience. Before you remove the old filter shut down the furnace. This is done by flipping the emergency switch mounted on the furnace to OFF. If you cannot locate this switch you can disconnect the power by switching off the circuit at the main breaker labeled "Furnace."

Once the power is off, open the hatch on the front of the furnace. Using a vacuum cleaner with the upholstery brush attachment, remove all dirt and lint that has built up. Make sure not to disturb any of the wiring inside the furnace; it may result in the system not turning back on.

When you are finished with all work on your furnace be sure to replace the cover back on the front correctly. That panel must be positioned correctly for the furnace blower to operate. The panel compresses a switch that triggers the blower to function. After the panel is situated then switch the emergency toggle or "furnace" circuit back on.

You may notice an odor for the first few moments the furnace runs after a season of little or no use. This is normal and is caused by dust that has settled in the ducts, it should pass quickly. **However**, if the odor smells like gas react immediately. Vacate the premises; call the Fire Department and Gas Company. Do this without shutting of any lights or adjusting the thermostat; any spark is liable to ignite the gas.

Humidifier

Humidifiers are an option designed to work in conjunction with the furnace. The humidifier adds moisture to the heat that is supplied within the home. It is not intended to be used with the Air Conditioner.

It is advisable to shut down your humidifier in the Spring, during this period of no use.

Read your humidifier's manual for further instructions and maintenance.

Insulation

Insulation is a key component in your home's energy envelope. The energy envelope is made up of the floors, ceilings, doors, and windows of your house. When this energy envelope is maintained correctly your homes remains comfortable and you save money in energy costs, such as heating and cooling.

Most heat and/or energy is lost through the ceiling. Around 60% or more of heat loss is due to inadequate maintenance of attic insulation; we all understand heat rises.

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Within the attic blown or loose-fill insulation is used. This insulation is loose and can become uneven. The effectiveness of the insulation is compromised if work is done and the insulation no longer lays smooth and even. It is also possible for air currents within the attic space to shift the loose-fill insulation. If you notice an area bare of insulation replace it with surplus from another location. To do this you may want to use a plastic rake.

Be sure if you are to walk in the attic space that you wear shoes. Never step on the drywall; rather keep your footing on the wood joists traversing your attic space.

Landscaping

A licensed surveyor approved the grading and drainage around your home. It is important to maintain that drainage so your basement never takes on water. It is suggested that large plants or trees not be installed within five feet of the foundation.

It is also important not to buildup flowerbeds higher than the original height of the grading around the home. If you buildup around the house there is potential for water to back up and enter at the top of the foundation. You should notice a part of the foundation that remains exposed, under the point where the side or brick ends.

After heavy rains you will notice the majority of water has moved away from your home. It is normal for some of this water to accumulate in the yard. It may take as long as 24 hours to drain or absorb into the yard; and up to 72 hours in the swales.

Settling of the ground is likely to occur where the utility lines have been trenched. Similar to the issue raised in the “Grading and Drainage” section, depressions in the ground may become apparent. What happens is the ground gets saturated and returns to the normal compaction level.

To address this occurrence, roll back the sod, if there is any, and spread topsoil to level off the ground. You can pick up bags of topsoil at most multipurpose hardware and garden centers. If more is needed, contact a landscaper to supply you with larger quantities. Once the ground is back to level roll the sod back into place or apply seed.

Having a landscaped yard is important to prevent unnecessary erosion.

Locks

If your locks ever become stiff, use a graphite or silicone lubricant to ease its operation. Do not use oil on a lock for it will congeal in colder temperatures and make the lock stiff again.

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There is a risk of using too much of either the graphite or silicone lubricant so be sparing. One tip that works well is to rub a pencil onto your key. Insert the key into the lock a number of times. The graphite lead will coat the lock and lubricate it without becoming messy.

Mirrors

Cleaning of mirrors should be done with any liquid glass cleaner. Squirt the glass cleaner onto a rag then wipe the mirror as necessary. Avoid using acidic cleaners because they can cause the silvering to deteriorate.

Paint and Stain

To touch up an area use a small brush to apply paint only to the damaged area. The reason to keep touch ups in a minimal area is because under certain lighting conditions these areas can be visible. Before using the paint make sure it is mixed well. Separation can occur in paint causing some areas to look darker than others. Always check the surface before painting to ensure it is clean and free of holes. For any holes and gouges review the section “Drywall” in this manual.

There are two types of paint used by The Dearborn-Buckingham Group which we have provided in your touch up kit. The flat paint is for the walls and ceilings. The other paint is a glossy paint that dries with a sheen and is used on all the trim and doors in your home.

For touch up on stained interior surfaces, use of a furniture polish is suggested. Products like Old English Furniture Polish or Scratch Cover are inexpensive, easy to use, and they blend well. Follow all directions on the bottle when using these products.

Maintenance

The preservation of the exterior painted surfaces of your home will provide lasting beauty and value. Check these areas annually and plan on refinishing the exterior surfaces every two or three years. Look for areas of chipping or wearing away of paint. Repaint these areas to save on extensive damage and wear costs. Use a quality exterior paint formulated for the climate conditions.

Phone Jacks

Your home has been outfitted with phone jacks in locations directed by either the blueprints or an addendum. Additional jacks or locations can be selected at the time the home selections are made. The telephone jacks terminate in the basement. Ordering, initiating, and connecting along with any changes or additions are the responsibility of the homeowner.

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Plumbing

It is important for you to locate and know the location of your main water shut-off valve. We discussed the importance of the gas shut-off valve in a previous section. The reasoning is similar; emergencies like a water line freeze or rupture will cause a situation that needs immediate attention.

The next general note The Dearborn-Buckingham Group would like for you to be aware of is the water saving regulation enacted by the federal government in 1993. This directive prohibits builders from installing toilets that use more than 1.6 gallons of water per flush. Your home has been furnished with toilets that comply with this rule; you are helping to conserve water.

The downside of the water conserving toilets is that they may need to be flushed twice to completely empty the bowl. Even considering the need to flush twice, it has been found that these toilets are saving a valuable resource.

Along the same lines as the toilets, all faucets and showerheads have flow restrictors to serve the same purpose; these cannot be removed.

Maintenance

Your plumbing fixtures should be cleaned with a soft sponge and soapy water. The use of abrasive cleaners is strongly discouraged. Abrasive cleaners will remove the shiny finish on the fixtures. Once the surface has been cleaned, use a dry cloth to polish out the water spots.

Faucets over time may begin to drip. This is commonly caused by a washer that has outlived its expected lifespan. To begin shut off the water at the valve directly under the sink. Next, remove the faucet stem, change the washer, and return the faucet stem. Showers are repaired in a similar fashion. It is suggested that if you do this maintenance on your own to take the washer with you to the hardware store. This will ensure you buy the exact size you need.

Another nuisance that is common is the running toilet. When this occurs, remove the tank lid and check the float valve. Most likely it is either lifted too high in the tank or it is rubbing against the side of the tank. If the float is too high bend the rod down until it rests at the appropriate level. The shut-off float should be free from all obstructions. If this does not solve the issue then check the chain attached to the flush handle. If there is no slack in the chain it will prevent the rubber stopper at the bottom from sealing.

Aerators are found on every faucet. They collect mineral deposits that find their way into the plumbing system. Every three to four months you will want to clean the aerators. Without doing so you may notice water pressure becoming low.

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Assuming your home is heated to a typical temperature your plumbing pipes should not freeze. Your pipes should not freeze at temperatures above 32 degrees F. It is suggested that a consistent 65 degrees be maintained if your home is left unattended during winter months. You may even consider draining your water supply if leaving for extended periods. To do so, shut off your main water supply valve and open the faucets throughout the home to relieve pressure.

Also, before the onset of cold temperatures remove all hoses from the exterior faucets. The hose bibs are freeze resistant, however if the hoses are still connected there is potential for problems. Water can freeze in the hose and expand back into the plumbing, causing a rupture. Drain and remove all hoses before freezing temperatures.

Many disposal clogs are due to improper garbage disposal use. Run plenty of cold water before, during and after using the garbage disposal. With a sufficient flow of cold water, even with grease, the blades are best able to cut and pass through the plumbing. Should a clog still occur, use a plunger.

If anywhere in your home you discover a leak in the plumbing lines, immediately shut off the water supply. Ideally you'd want to shut the valve supplying that area specifically; but if need be shut the main valve. Once this is done call the plumbing contractor.

Resilient Flooring

Resilient flooring – sheet vinyl or vinyl tile – is a popular flooring material for kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms. Resilient floors are designed for minimum care; however, they do require some maintenance. All flooring needs to be cleaned regularly and followed with a floor finish. This will provide for a high gloss sheen to be retained. All cleaning agents should be deferred for two weeks after installation so the adhesive has time to set.

Maintenance

Your flooring should be vacuumed or swept regularly to remove abrasive dirt. All spills that occur on the resilient flooring should be wiped up immediately to reduce risks of staining. Occasionally, your flooring will require mopping; use a damp mop and a tablespoon of white vinegar to one gallon of warm water. Keep water to a minimum; excessive water can penetrate seams and ruin the underlayment.

Once the flooring is completely clean, apply a floor wax. Be sure to choose a product rated for your type of flooring and not a furniture wax. A water-based self-polishing wax works well and will maintain the new-floor look.

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Roof

Limit walking on the roof. Not only is it a hazard but the weight and movement can loosen the roofing materials. This can lead to leakage issues. If your roof is wet, walking on the roof should not be attempted; shingles are extremely slippery when wet.

Should a leak occur, detect the location and collect any water you can. Once the roof is dry you will be able to show a professional where the leak occurred and it can be repaired.

Maintenance

The shingles used to finish your roof do not require you to treat or seal them. However, the roof is not considered maintenance-free. The main concern when it comes to your roof is keeping it clear of debris. Keeping your roof debris-free is important to improve watershed. It also will prevent mold, fungus and rot.

Regular attention and maintenance to your gutters and downspouts will also protect your roof. Please review section “Gutters and Downspouts.”

Siding

Vinyl siding is an attractive looking product that is not prone to the shortcomings of aluminum or wood siding. It does not split, warp, buckle or have to be re-painted.

Maintenance

Cleaning the siding twice a year is the extent of maintenance on your vinyl siding. One time in the spring and again in the fall is good. Use a pressure washer along with a mild detergent to remove any build-up of dirt.

Smoke Detectors

The best form of life protection for your money comes by way of smoke detectors strategically placed throughout the home. It is figured that a working smoke detector doubles an individual’s chance at surviving a fire. The functioning smoke detector provides warning of a situation before it is too late to evacuate.

The smoke detectors found throughout your home are A/C powered; meaning they are directly wired by the electrician to a power source. These smoke detectors are also backed-up by an independent battery within the detector; this allows the smoke detector to operate during power outages. Change your batteries when setting your clocks for daylight savings time.

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Your smoke detectors are all wired together for increased safety and advanced warning. When one smoke detector is set off, they all will begin to sound. This allows someone sufficient time to evacuate the second floor if a fire begins elsewhere in the home.

Maintenance

Seasonally, you should clean the smoke detectors within the home. This can be done by vacuuming around the unit, paying attention to the sensor area. You should disconnect the unit from the collar, as you would to change the battery, and vacuum this area as well. Once you have replaced the smoke detector test to make sure the unit is operational once again.

Once a month, your smoke alarm system should be tested to ensure all detectors are operational. Use something long enough to reach the smoke detector. Depress and hold the test button on the detector and wait for the detector to sound; continue holding until the rest of the detectors begin to set off.

A yearly test is recommended to guarantee that the smoke detectors work correctly. Using several matches you can test that the sensors. Strike the matches and then blow them out. Direct the smoke towards the unit. This should trigger the alarm system to go off.

Stairs

Although much care and attention has been taken during the installation of your staircase, a staircase is likely to vibrate or squeak when walked upon by an adult. This is normal and is part of the acclimation of your stair components.

It is common that shrinkage cracks develop where the staircase meets the wall. This can be remedied with a bead of latex caulk; once the caulk dries it can be touched up with paint to match. Review the section “Caulking” for more information.

Vents

For energy cost savings, homes are built sound and secure. With less potential for energy leaks a new potential concern becomes relevant. Accumulation of indoor pollutants such as cooking odors and carbon monoxide, along with condensation, can occur. To curb this from becoming a problem your home was constructed with mechanical and passive ventilation.

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You will notice that there are vents in locations on the roof at the eaves and peaks of the roof. This is to provide an upward flow of air. Periodically you should check your attic space to verify nothing is blocking the vents. Without proper ventilation in the attic space the atmosphere can become excessively humid or “tropical” and rot may develop. Condensation will occur as a result of poorly circulating air and the saturation will ruin the insulation. Should you notice that your vents become clogged, clear the obstruction immediately.

Water Heater

It is recommended that you read and review the care and maintenance portion of your water heater manufacturer’s literature.

Towards the bottom of your hot water heater there is a temperature controller. The thermostat on the water tank will adjust the temperature to which the water is heated. Check with the manual for recommended settings; typically it is 140 degrees F or the setting labeled “normal.”

Maintenance

Over time your water heater will collect with sediment at the bottom of the tank. The residue will cause your water heater to operate at sub-optimal levels. You should plan to clear the tank by draining the tank partially every year. To do this you will want to connect a hose to the draincock found at the bottom of the tank. Place the other end of the hose in a floor drain or sump pit, then open the draincock valve. Once you have drained a portion of the tank close off the valve and disconnect the hose. Doing this annually will prolong the life of the tank as well as conserve energy and money.

Damp-proofing

Your basement foundation walls have been treated with an exterior spray-on damp-proofing material. This measure will help ensure your foundation does not seep water. Despite detail to craftsmanship and the extra measure of this damp-proofing material it is possible dampness may become apparent during periods of excessive rain. If this happens it is usually due to a change in positive drainage near the home; please review the section “Grading and Drainage.”

Windows, Screens, and Sliding Glass Doors

Your windows and the sliding glass door have channels at the base of the frame. This channel tends to collect water during rains and drains through weep holes. Occasionally, it’s a good idea to clean this bottom channel to clear it of dirt and debris so the weep holes function correctly when needed.

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Condensation forming on interior surfaces of the window and window frame is due to high humidity. If the home is humid and the outside temperatures are low this occurrence is likely. To correct the underlying problem please review the section “Condensation.” As for condensation in regards to your windows, you should wipe off all moisture from any wood trim immediately to preserve the integrity and beauty of the wood.

As time goes by your windows, screens and sliding glass doors will begin to stick. It is good to occasionally spray a silicone lubricant in the tracks. The silicone lubricant will coat the parts causing excessive friction and will last a year to two years.

Wood Trim

Depending on the temperature and humidity levels your wood trim may experience shrinkage and separation from the walls. This is common due to the expansion and contraction of the wood from climate fluctuations. It is a good idea to address these repairs after the first heating season. Typically, all that is needed to touch up is caulk and paint.

When the trim has visibly pulled away from the wall it is easy to repair. Start by driving a nail next to the existing nail hole. Fill the holes with putty and touch up with paint to match the trim.