

# Autumn Home Maintenance

## Preparing for winter

**What is home maintenance?** Home maintenance includes everything from regular cleaning to repairs and replacements. It can be a job as small as changing a washer to stop a tap dripping, cleaning your chimney or as large as repainting the whole house.

Most New Zealanders' homes are their biggest investments, so it's important to protect them. Good maintenance will: • help keep your home safe and secure • keep you and your family healthy • save you money by allowing you to fix problems before they get bigger • protect your financial investment. Many modern homes are described as 'low maintenance', but this does not mean 'no maintenance'. There is no such thing as a maintenance-free house.

If your home was built or received building consent after July 1 1992 you are responsible for making sure it continues to meet Building Code requirements.

**BUILDING CONSENTS** - You won't need building consent to carry out most maintenance tasks, but any work you do must be of a standard required in the Building Act 2004. You will need a building consent for work such as re-piling, plumbing and drainage work, unless it is just maintenance and repair. If you are doing any major work such as construction, alteration, demolition and site works, check with your building consent authority - Hutt City Council about a building consent first.

**GENERAL HOME MAINTENANCE** - Once a year you should check your roof cladding, chimneys and flashings, trees and vegetation clearance near your home, .

**When working on a roof:**

- Ensure the roof is dry – do not climb onto a wet or damp roof as they can be very slippery.
- Walk along the nail lines.
- On roofs over 15 degrees slope use a roof ladder.

If you are painting a roof, trimming trees, cleaning guttering, replacing spouting, roofing, repairing chimneys and there are power lines nearby, arrange with your power company to disconnect the supply before carrying out the work.

**Check flashings for corrosion or lifting** - Flashings protect vulnerable areas of the roof. If they fail, they can affect the weathertightness of the roof allowing water to get into your home.

**Guttering/spouting** - Clear out debris and check for blockages and corrosion (if metal) in the guttering, outlet or stormwater drain. Make sure there is an even fall along the guttering to the outlet to prevent ponding.

**Trees** - Trees that are adjacent to the house should be kept well trimmed. Keep your gutters clear of leaves and debris. Consider using a gutter guard to prevent leaves lodging in guttering.

**Damp cladding/masonry** - If soil builds up against your house, or if pavers or paths are installed too close to the house or against the cladding, this can make the cladding damp and keep it that way. If this continues over a long period, moisture can get into the framing or under the floor and cause rot. Check around the house to make sure there is adequate clearance from grass, garden or paved surfaces. Make sure foundation air vents are kept clear of leaves and other garden debris.

**Plants growing into drains or under foundations** - This can cause blockages and weaken the foundations. Remove plants either by pulling them, or using weed killer. If damage has already been caused to the foundations, seek advice from a building engineer.

**Garden obstructing under the floor vents** - This can cause moisture to build up under the floor, which can make your home damp. This is a common problem. Foundations are designed to allow air to circulate. Blocking vents upsets this system and can cause serious moisture problems. Clear soil and plants away from under the floor vents.

**TIMBER DECKS** - maintenance should be carried out regularly to ensure the deck is safe.

**Water ponding against house** - This can happen if there's not enough of a drainage gap between the deck and the house. Use a 100 x 3.75mm nail to clear the gap between the decking boards and check that there is a 12mm minimum gap between the house and the deck structure. Check that flashings take water away from the house and allow it to drain away.

## Installing a Woodburner?

**Now that the weather is getting cooler, you may be considering putting in a wood burner. All new wood burner installations require a home owner to apply for a building consent from their local council for fire safety reasons, but you now also are required to check that the wood burner meets the National Environmental Wood Burner Standard.**

The National Environmental Wood Burner Standard was introduced to provide a design standard for wood burners in urban areas to protect the public health. This means that all wood burners installed in a property of less than 2 hectares after 1 September 2005 must have:

- An emission of less than 1.5 grams of particles per kilogram of dry wood burnt
- A thermal efficiency of greater than 65%.

The presence of fine particles in the air is linked to sickness and hospitalisation due to a range of health impacts like respiratory symptoms, heart problems and premature death. In NZ 80-90% of fine particles in the air come from the burning of wood or coal in domestic appliances.

The MfE web site has a list of approved wood burners (including wetback and pellet models) which are accepted by the council. - [www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz) or call 0800 AIR NES (0800 247 637)



**Rotten timber** - This can be a safety hazard and may support toxic mould, which poses health risks. Check under the deck and any areas where timber meets other timber (eg joists, bearers, decking) as these areas can trap moisture. Carefully check any dark patches as these indicate high levels of moisture.

**Blackish stains** - Blackish stains around bolt holes can indicate that the bolts are rusting, in which case they'll need to be replaced. Also check for undersized washers. Bolted connections often require a 50mm x 50mm square washer or a 55mm diameter round washer to be effective. Use stainless steel bolts if you are near the sea.

**Loose balustrades or posts** - These are a safety hazard because they may fail when they are needed to prevent someone falling. Ensure they are securely connected to the deck structure and that the barrier doesn't wobble.

**INTERNAL DECKS** - Check that all drainage pipes and overflows are clear and that there is no sign of damage to the deck membrane and the bottom of the cladding is clear of all mould or debris.

**WOODBURNERS** - If you have a woodburner in your home, things you should check for are:

**Corrosion of flue pipe, cowl or fastenings** - This could be due to a build up of combustion deposits. Clean the flue, and the roof around it, regularly during the heating season to keep combustion deposits to a minimum. Fires can occur in flues or chimneys that haven't been cleaned. For existing corrosion, remove the rust and then paint with a zinc-rich primer. Prime with galvanised iron primer and apply roof paint. Replace severely damaged fastenings with hot dipped galvanised or stainless steel fastenings as appropriate to reduce corrosion in future OR

Use a chimney sweep. Look in the [Yellow Pages](#) under Chimney Sweeps.

**Crumbling chimney mortar** - Crumbling mortar could be due to moisture getting in. The mortar will need re-pointing and this is a job for the professionals. If the chimney pot is badly damaged you may want to consider replacing it with a metal cowl. If the chimney is no longer used, block off the top to stop birds, rain and draughts.

**Insecure metal flue** - This could be due to corrosion of the fixings, especially in areas near the sea.

If the fixings have corroded, replace them with hot dipped galvanised ones. This will only be a temporary solution - you will eventually need to replace the nails, especially if you live close to the sea. Replace or re-fix others, increasing the number if necessary.

**SMOKE DETECTORS** - Check that they are installed and operational. For further information on where to locate these go to [www.fire.org.nz/home\\_kids/tips/smokealarm.htm](http://www.fire.org.nz/home_kids/tips/smokealarm.htm)

### Tips for efficient wood burning

- Stock up on wood 6-12 months before winter to burn dry, well seasoned wood
- Stack wood loosely in a dry place so air can pass freely through the pile.
- Never use drift wood, painted or chemically treated wood as these release dioxins when they burn
- Burn smaller hotter fires which are more efficient
- Never overload your wood burner by placing too much wood in the fire
- Do not turn down your burner overnight – a slow smouldering fire creates more emissions

### HCC requirements when installing a woodburner

You will need to provide 2 copies of the following information:

- Scale 1:50 floor plan of your house with the proposed location of the fire on white paper in black ink.
- Manufacturer's specification – this will include the make, model, clearances around the fire.
- Flue and weatherproofing details through the ceiling and roof.
- Location of smoke detectors
- Proof of ownership – i.e. Certificate of title, rates bill

If you are wanting to install a wood burner with a wet back you will also need to provide a drawing of the plumbing and drainage details.