

Handy Maintenance Guide For Tenants

As a Tenant, it's easy to see the rent payment as your only responsibility, however, it is important to remember that living in a home requires time and effort to make sure things continue to run smoothly. We have made a special point to communicate our philosophy to you already, that we are now business partners and beyond the financial responsibilities we also have hired you as the PRIMARY MAINTENANCE TEAM for your home. Keeping up with the day to day tasks of maintaining a home in tip-top shape takes time and sometimes a little cash but saves all of us money and headaches in the long run.

Don't let this information scare you, it's a lot, but we have attempted to only include tasks that can easily be performed with just a few simple tools. Most importantly, we do not want you to do anything that is outside your comfort zone. If you notice a door handle getting loose, please take the time to get a screwdriver and tighten it up before it falls apart and the screw get lost. If you have any questions about what or how to do something, call us and we can help you figure it out. Google and YouTube can often help but please be wary of internet information and be sure to confirm with multiple sources or, again, if you are not sure, feel free to contact us.

Here in the office we create checklists to help streamline processes. It's easy to jot down a task or two a week and make it easy. We've included tasks that need to be done regularly, and some that just need done a few times a year. Our maintenance team will perform a Seasonal Inspection to make sure things are being kept up and to get the house ready for the changing seasons here in Missouri. This is usually done in Spring and Fall, and we will let you know when we prepare to make the rounds. In the meantime, getting everything on this list accomplished on your own is expected and necessary to keep the house in proper operating condition, and will save you real dollars on utility bills for example, and save you inconveniences by preventing major maintenance issues down the road.

Preventative Maintenance

Preventative Maintenance is really the key to efficient home maintenance, so we want to highlight it here and give you a clear definition of what we mean by Preventative Maintenance. The idea is that by routinely inspecting systems and components you will notice issues early and PREVENT more costly maintenance events in the future, thereby saving both the Tenants and the Landlord time and money. The best practice for inspecting systems and their components is while cleaning. **To be clear Preventative Maintenance means cleaning and inspections.** As you routinely clean the home and its components take the time to inspect for any signs of potential damage or problems that may be on the horizon. Living there over time will allow you to know your homes components and systems better than us. By having a sharp awareness and keeping things clean and adjusted you will quickly notice when something is not working like it should or normally does. If it is a simple fix to tighten, tune, and adjust then now is always the time. If it is beyond your understanding or ability, then please make a maintenance request. Either way you we rely on YOU to be AWARE and either remedy the situation or notify us promptly.

To help us all stay ahead of things and keep your home operating smoothly we are providing the following list of things in most homes that need the closest and most frequent attention. If cleaning isn't your strong suit you may consider having our recommended cleaning company come out and help once a month or a couple times a year. Their fee is very reasonable, and we don't seem to ever do as good of a job as the pros!

- **Inspect HVAC filters.** Inspect the filters at least once a month. If they are dirty, replace them right away. Clean filters will save you money on bills and prevent expensive breakdowns. Also, make sure to keep the area around the furnace and/or ac units clean and clear of any dust or debris. We will typically service our hvac systems twice a year, every spring and fall but they need your help in between our visits. (See HVAC supplement for more info)
- **Clean kitchen disposal.** The best rule for sinks is to never put kitchen grease down the drain and minimize the amount of waste put in the disposal. We've heard a good trick to cleaning the disposal, freeze vinegar in an ice tray and crunch them up in the disposal. The ice sharpens the blades and the vinegar leaves it fresh. You can also use lemon or lime juice to freshen it up. The P-trap under the sink is where problems often develop first, and you can easily clean it if the sink drain is clogged. Just remember to put a bucket under it when you take it apart because it will be full of water. Also make certain it isn't leaking after you reinstall as water leaks under the sink can cause real damage.
- **Clean oven** – Some ovens are self-cleaning, others you will need to do yourself. On coil ranges you may have to remove the heating element to properly clean the bowls under them. Most gas ranges will need cleaned under the top lid from time to time.
- **Clean range hood filters.** Cleaning this is gross if you've never done it before. We recommend taking it outside and using an oven degreaser and hose, that should do the trick. Once it's done and you put it on a regular schedule, you'll find it's much easier going after the first time.

- **Vacuum your refrigerator coils.** Another great money saving task, refrigerators use a relatively large percentage of your electricity per month. Dirty coils can cost you \$100 or more per year, and the vacuum does all the work. If you roll the fridge forward just take care to not damage vinyl flooring by scooting it side to side.
- **Test smoke detectors.** Easy, just press the test button. If the alarm doesn't sound, replace the batteries and try again. If it's still not working, there could be some corrosion on the contacts. A quick wipe down, another test. With wired smoke detectors realize that sometimes a dead battery in one can make others start annoyingly beeping also.
- **Inspect garage door.** Check the components of your garage door especially looking for loose bolts or nuts, which can end up putting the door in a bind and wearing out the motor prematurely. WD40 or a similar water-based lubricant can be used on tracks and chains routinely to keep them operating smoothly. Be careful not to move or bump sensors, as this may put them out of alignment; if the door is not wanting to shut this may be the issue.
- **Run water through pipes.** If you have unused areas of the house with water, running those sinks, tubs and toilets occasionally can help keep grime and sediment from accumulating.
- **Deep cleans.** Once a season, get everyone together to do a deep clean of the whole home. Clean all windows, appliances, and surfaces. Letting dirt build up over a year can quickly ruin systems and your enjoyment of the home. We are not writing this section because we like to write; the house must be thoroughly cleaned on a regular basis. Again, this is another time to think about calling in the pros and spending a few dollars to save yourself some time.

Seasonal Inspections and Preventative Maintenance

Spring / Summer

They don't call it spring cleaning for nothing. Take advantage of spring fever and get outside to make sure the exterior of your home survived the winter without damage. Missouri is sure to have sweltering summer heat and 100%+ humidity on the way and now is the time to start getting ready. We will be making the rounds to help make sure some of these things are done but we hope you can manage to take care of these items, so we can be more efficient doing what we need to do to keep the home in great shape.

This is also storm season. If you think you have any damage to roofs or otherwise, please let us know asap. Even if you do not think there is damage, but you had hail larger than a dime let us know so we can check to be sure. Limbs that grow quickly in the spring and summer may fall or start to rub on the houses and structures; they will need trimmed or removed. Also, let us know if limbs are interfering with electric utility lines. A good rule of thumb is if branches and yard debris can be broken down and/or moved around and disposed of then it is your responsibility; if a chain saw is required then give us a call and we will get it taken care of.

- **Yard work.** If you didn't trim trees or shrubs in the fall as part of your gardening, do it now, and make certain they are not growing against the houses and structures. Plants are good about finding cracks, which can cause serious damage. Watch for vines, and prune accordingly. Fence rows are particularly good at getting out of control as vegetation grows quickly in the spring. Keeping the yard and landscaping maintained and looking good is part of your responsibility as the resident. Overgrowth of vegetation can be one of the most damaging and costly neglected duties; DO NOT overlook the yard work!
- **Watch for insects.** Insects are everywhere in the summer. Make sure to clear cobwebs, have an ant killer handy, and make sure doors and windows are tightly closed. We treat houses for termites every five or six years and that helps kill other bugs, but we cannot be expected to control nature every summer when the critters come around. Often some relatively inexpensive products from Lowes or Walmart will do the trick. If you feel you have an infestation beyond your control we have a professional pest company that we can recommend or call.
- **Check the exterior drainage.** Make sure that water is flowing away from the house. Watch for water pooling near the foundation. Check gutters and spouts for any obstructions or loose connections. We have gutters cleaned once or twice per year. If you notice something that's an easy fix we appreciate the help, if not, give us a call.
- **Test sump pump.** Don't wait until a huge rain to find out if your sump pump isn't working. Not every home has one, but if you do, you want it working. It should not be loud when it operates and make sure the discharge line does not get obstructed or plugged up with dirt and leaves. If you ever have water in your basement or crawl space, contact us immediately.
- **Inspect the exterior.** Is there any damage to the siding or cracks in the brick? Are there any holes in the soffits or fascia? Take a close look and jot down any issues you find. Watch for any cracks in the foundation. A tube of exterior paintable caulk can fix a lot of your problems. Missouri has a healthy woodpecker population and they can destroy a house. Contact us immediately if you have a problem with woodpeckers.
- **Open crawl space vents.** The crawl space will need to breath in the hot and humid summer.
- **Clean and repair deck/patio.** Most likely it needs a good sweeping and washing. We have them re-sealed every five or six years but keeping them cleaned off and free from leaves and debris in the meantime can drastically lengthen how often they require more expensive work. Also watch for any loose boards or posts and repair if possible. You can use a screwdriver or hammer occasionally, to keep things tight.
- **Make note of damaged window screens.** Holes allow pests to get in. Replace screens as needed. They make a cheap screen repair kit that you can find almost anywhere. It has a small roller tool to help reset and tighten a screen that has been pushed or come loose.
- **Clean out window wells of debris.** Window wells are found on any home with a basement and some that don't have a basement. Some homes crawl space entrance is in a window type well also. Window wells collect leaves, trash and the occasional animal.
- **Get your air conditioning system ready for summer.** Remove debris and vegetation. If you use a weed eater around the condenser take care not to hit the thin thermostat wire or the copper

line set. Make sure the filters and system are clean, operational, and ready before the first hot day when everyone is calling the AC companies for help.

- **Check exhaust and dryer vents.** Run your dryer, and check for a nice smelling exhaust. If not, you may find there is a blockage. Disconnect your machine from the exhaust line and vacuum up all the lint you can. Let us know if its plugged up and not discharging air at the outlet.
- **Clean garage.** It can be a big job, but clean the garage every summer. Out of sight, out of mind is usually how people treat the garage, but depending on how much you use it, you may need to clean it a couple times a year.

Fall / Winter

By fall you should have finished up spring and summer home maintenance tasks, and now it's time to prepare our home for the winter months. Winter weather can be very rough on a home. We make the rounds to be sure things are ready but need you to perform the following and let us know if something needs special attention.

- **Get your furnace ready for the cold weather.** Make sure doors and windows are properly sealed, this can save you a bundle in utility costs. Check registers and confirm that they are free of furniture and have good airflow. You can vacuum out the ducts to remove junk that falls in the register. Again, it's a good idea to make sure your furnace is cleaned up and running smooth before it gets cold. That first cold snap will have all those who don't think ahead waiting for overloaded heating techs to arrive to their cold house.
- **Turn off and flush outdoor water faucets.** Disconnect all hoses and install styrofoam faucet covers; they cost less than \$2. We probably left a couple there last year.
- **Close the crawl space vents and openings.** You will want to keep in the warmth during the winter to help with utility heating bills and prevent pipes from freezing.

A side note on freezing pipes: be sure to keep furnace set at 50 degrees minimum during cold weather and you can open sink cabinet doors and leave water at a slow drip to prevent freezing. Be cautious of rooms with plumbing that do not have a heat source such as utility rooms or exterior wall sinks. If a pipe breaks you may have to turn off the water at the meter in the ground near the street. It would be best to know where that is and how to do it before it is an emergency.

- **Check sidewalks and driveways for cracks.** Water loves to get into cracks, freeze, and cause damage; an inexpensive tube of the proper concrete caulking will quickly fill them up and prevent further damage.
- **Buy winter gear.** Have sidewalk salt, good shovels, etc. ready for winter. You never know when that first snow will come!
- **Check for ice blocks.** When snow and ice pile up on a roof it can be very heavy and cause serious damage. Make sure roof and gutters are draining well and don't let icicles grow, as

much as the kids may want you to. They can cause injuries, and the melt-off can create problems around the base of the house.

- **Tighten hardware.** There will probably be at least one or two snow days during the winter and that's a great time to go around the house and tighten any loose hardware on doors, hinges, and other fixtures. Its best to leave a couple screwdrivers somewhere handy so this can be done anytime you notice something is loose also.
- **Clean bathroom vent fan and replace bulb if it has one.** It is important to ventilate the bathroom especially when taking hot showers and creating steam. To keep moisture content down and prevent bacterial growth make sure to run the vent fan and/or open a window. Like any fan, it will get covered in dust and must be cleaned to operate smoothly and efficiently. These are also relatively cheap to replace when they do die, so let us know if yours isn't working.
- **Check grout in bathrooms, kitchen, and wet areas.** This will prolong the life of your tiled surfaces and just looks better. A cheap tube of fresh caulking can make wet areas look better and prevent damage from water finding its way where it doesn't belong. Let us know if we need to show you how to quickly and easily do this.
- **Inspect plumbing.** Check for any small leaks around sinks, vanities and toilets. Aerators can be changed easily to increase water flow. Make sure not to have things stored around the plumbing so it's easier to quickly know if it does leak.
- **Basement cleaning.** While cleaning, watch for areas of moisture or mold. Dust thoroughly, get rid of the cobwebs, and organize.

If you are still reading at this point, then we want to sincerely thank you and tell you how much we appreciate that you care about your home as much as we do. We are happy to have a responsible business partner and look forward to having you on our maintenance team. Again, you know your home better than us and we rely on you to help us take care its systems and components, and to let us know when you need help. We hope you consider having our cleaning company come out a couple times a year to help do some of the heavy lifting. A clean home is a happy home!