

The Fredericton Home Maintenance Checklist

Four seasons, written for New Brunswick houses — oil heat, heat pumps, air exchangers, frost, and a wet spring. Most of it is an afternoon. All of it is cheaper than the repair.

Fall SEPTEMBER · OCTOBER · NOVEMBER

- ☐ **Disconnect every garden hose.** A frost-free tap drains itself through the spout when you shut it off — and it cannot drain with a hose attached. The water left in the barrel freezes and splits the pipe inside the wall, where nothing shows until spring.
- ☐ **Fill the oil tank rather than running it down.** Empty space holds air, air holds moisture, and the water that condenses out settles on the bottom of the tank and corrodes it from the inside.
- ☐ **Test the well for bacteria.** New Brunswick recommends testing twice a year for total coliform and E. coli, and the autumn rainy season is one of the two.
- ☐ **Clean the gutters and get the downspouts away from the house.** Water discharging at the foundation freezes and thaws all winter, and that cycle is what opens cracks.
- ☐ **Have the chimney swept and inspected before the first fire.** Every year, by a WETT-certified sweep, if you burn wood.
- ☐ **Clean the air exchanger — filters and core both.** A plugged HRV is the most common reason windows stream with condensation in January.
- ☐ **Clear leaves out of the heat pump's outdoor unit** and check it sits high enough to stay above the snow.
- ☐ **Air-seal and top up the attic now, not in February.** Ice dams are made by heat leaking into the attic. Once there is snow on the roof you can only treat the symptom.
- ☐ **Check weatherstripping, door sweeps and the garage door seal.**
- ☐ **Test the sump pump** and make sure its discharge runs well clear of the foundation.

The one most people skip. The hose. It costs nothing, takes two minutes, and a split sillcock inside a finished wall is a drywall job on top of a plumbing job.

Winter

DECEMBER • JANUARY • FEBRUARY

- ☐ **Start a long-term radon test. Winter is the only right time.** Health Canada's guideline is 200 Bq/m³, the test has to run at least three months, and it should be done in the coolest months, when the house is closed up and levels are at their highest.
- ☐ **Keep snow and ice off the heat pump's outdoor unit.** It needs airflow, and it needs somewhere for defrost meltwater to go.
- ☐ **Keep furnace, boiler and water-heater vents clear of snow.** Sidewall vents block easily after a storm or a plough, and a blocked vent is a carbon monoxide risk, not a comfort problem.
- ☐ **Watch the eaves for ice dams.** A row of icicles and a water stain at the top of an exterior wall are the same problem seen from two sides.
- ☐ **Watch the roof after heavy wet snow or rain on snow.** Low-slope sections and roofs over additions carry the load worst.
- ☐ **On the coldest nights, open the cabinet doors** under sinks and vanities where the plumbing runs through an exterior wall.
- ☐ **Take window condensation seriously.** Steady condensation means humidity too high or ventilation too low, and it rots sills quietly for years before anyone notices.
- ☐ **Test smoke and CO alarms monthly, and read the date on the back.** Smoke alarms have a service life of about ten years; CO alarms seven to ten, depending on the model.
- ☐ **Keep the oil fill, the electrical meter and every exit clear** of snow and ice. The delivery driver will not dig.

Radon is a New Brunswick problem, not a theoretical one. Ground with shale and granite carries more uranium and produces more radon, and the only way to know what your house has is to measure it. Start the test in December and you will have an answer by spring.

Spring

MARCH • APRIL • MAY

- ☐ **Test the well for bacteria again, after the thaw.** That is the second of New Brunswick's two recommended tests. If general chemistry and metals have not been done in two or three years, send those at the same time.
- ☐ **Turn the outside taps on — then go inside and listen.** If a sillcock split over the winter, this is the moment it shows, and it shows inside the wall.
- ☐ **Walk the whole foundation.** New cracks, spalling concrete, and ground that has settled back toward the house instead of away from it.
- ☐ **Check the basement after the melt, and again after the first heavy rain.** Two different tests. A basement can pass one and fail the other.
- ☐ **Clean the gutters again** once the melt is finished and the seeds have come down.
- ☐ **Look at the roof from the ground with binoculars.** Lifted or missing shingles, damaged flashing, anything the ice moved over the winter.
- ☐ **Wash the heat pump's outdoor coil and change the indoor filters.**
- ☐ **Service the air exchanger again** — filters, core, and the intake and exhaust hoods outside.
- ☐ **Inspect the oil tank properly.** Legs and pad, fill and vent piping, and the date plate. Its age matters to your insurer, sometimes more than its condition.
- ☐ **Check the sills and the bottom courses of siding** where the snow sat longest against the house.

Spring is the honest season. Whatever the winter did to the house is visible now and hidden again by July. This is the walk worth doing slowly.

Summer JUNE · JULY · AUGUST

- ☐ **Put your head in the attic on a hot afternoon.** If it is like an oven up there, the ventilation is not working — and that costs you shingle life in July and buys you ice dams in January.
- ☐ **Inspect the deck at the ledger and the posts, not the surface boards.** Rot starts where water sits and where nobody looks.
- ☐ **Clean the dryer vent the whole way to the hood** and check that the flap actually closes.
- ☐ **Cut the vegetation back from the siding and the heat pump.** A foot of clearance, minimum, on both.
- ☐ **Look for failed window seals.** Fogging between the panes shows up most clearly in strong summer light.
- ☐ **Pump the septic tank** — every two to three years for most households — and keep the receipt with the house papers.
- ☐ **Recaulk and touch up exterior paint while everything is dry** — windows, doors, and anywhere something passes through the wall.
- ☐ **Check the water heater's age and drain some sediment off the bottom.** Most tanks last eight to twelve years, and they rarely fail politely.
- ☐ **Seal the driveway and fix anything on a walkway you could catch a toe on.**
- ☐ **Book the trades you will need in the fall.** Chimney sweeps, roofers and heat pump techs are all booked solid by October. In July they answer the phone.

If you find something and you are not sure how bad it is, call me. I came to real estate from construction, and I would rather tell you it is nothing than have you find out what it was from a buyer's inspector. There is more on wet basements, oil tanks, aluminum wiring, fogged windows and radon at hamelrealty.com — free to read, nothing to fill in.