



No matter where you live, you can always treat your home to energy savings tips and safety checks before the onset of winter. Falcon Home Inspections, LLC wants to share some quick, easy ideas that you can do yourself to ensure you have a great holiday and comfortable home during the long winter months.

INSPECT TO PROTECT!

Driveways, sidewalks and patios: Little cracks in concrete surfaces can quickly grow into big ones during the winter with the constant freezing and thawing of trapped moisture. Sealing cracks with ready-to-use concrete sealant is quick and easy: Just apply with a caulking gun or squeeze directly from the tube. A one-quart tube of sealant should around \$10 at most home improvement stores and it goes a long way. DID YOU KNOW...rock salt used for winter snow and ice removal can erode concrete surfaces and kill surrounding grass and plants, *so use deicing products* that are safe for your surfaces and landscaping.

Furnaces and ductwork: At a minimum, change or at least inspect your furnace filters once a month during heating season. Always call to have a full, professional furnace cleaning and tune-up of your heating appliance in the fall, as it will likely pay for itself in winter fuel savings. If your home is heated by a forced-air system, the U.S. Department of Energy says, about 20 percent of the warm air is wasted because of leaks and poorly sealed connections in the ductwork. It's well worth the cost to have your ductwork both cleaned out and properly sealed and repaired by a professional every few years.



Caulking, weather stripping, "shrink and seal" plastic window kits and spray foam insulation are all inexpensive household fixes

DIY weatherproofing: An calking experiment showed that every 10-ounce tube of window caulking (costing about \$3 each) used to seal cracks around the house lowered the heating bill by about \$3 per month. Over the course of the winter, that meant a savings of about \$15 per \$3 tube, and that was only in the first year. **It's a** interesting thought you can caulk your way to becoming a millionaire! But seriously, these simple,



do-it-yourself steps for increasing energy efficiency around the home almost always pay for themselves in a single heating season. In addition to caulking, weather stripping around windows and doors, "shrink and seal" plastic window kits and spray foam insulation for filling larger gaps and cracks are all quick, easy and inexpensive fixes.

Outdoor water supplies/pipes: Unless outdoor water faucets are properly insulated or specifically designed for year-round use, the water supply to them needs to be shut off and the fixtures opened and properly drained before freezing temperatures set in. Similarly, in-ground irrigation systems for lawns and landscaping need to be fully drained (usually through a bleed-off valve) to avoid freezing. Carefully check and properly insulate any exposed pipes in crawl spaces and along exterior walls of the home. A burst water pipe caused by freezing is expensive to repair, but often it's only the beginning in terms of the total cost of repairing the resulting water damage.

Fireplaces and chimneys: For safety and energy efficiency, devote a little time to your fireplace and chimney before you light it for the first time this fall. Having your chimney professionally cleaned and inspected every two or three years is highly recommended and every year if you use your fireplace regularly. To prevent water damage and possible fire hazards, fill cracks in the masonry work and around the chimney with a fireplace mortar product available at home improvement centers. Make sure the damper closes tightly when the fireplace isn't in use, so as to reduce the amount of heat escaping up the chimney. If you rarely use your fireplace, consider investing \$60 or so in a DIY "chimney draft stopper" — an inflatable balloon-type device that temporarily seals off the chimney to reduce both heat and air conditioning loss to virtually zero.

Now that you've prepared your home and other valuables for the long winter ahead, treat yourself to a cup of hot chocolate or glass of wine in front of a roaring fire in your fireplace. **Just make sure to deflate your chimney draft stopper first!!**

And remember, if you don't have the time to perform these checks yourself, you can call Falcon Home Inspections, LLC for a pre-season inspection.

