



Home Maintenance Guide

This guide gives practical help and advice about general maintenance. DIY is not easy and hopefully this guidance will assist in deciding when to tackle basic home repairs and alert you to the danger of taking on too much before getting professional help.

Why Look After Your Home?

Your home is probably the biggest investment you will ever make. It needs to be looked after and maintained to keep it fit and comfortable to live in. Routine maintenance and repair will save you money by ensuring minor defects do not turn into major problems. If you do not carry out regular maintenance and repair several things could happen including:

- **Your house could deteriorate resulting in unhealthy or dangerous conditions**
- **You could damage adjoining buildings for which you may be liable**
- **Your house could lose some of its value**
- **The area you live in could deteriorate gradually**

For information on finding a trader and paying for works the Office of Fair Trading, have produced some very useful leaflets (Telephone 0870 6060321).

Extra help and advice

DIY – most of the DIY chains now produce 'how to' leaflets to help you tackle a range of home improvement works yourself. If they don't have a leaflet, they may have an expert on hand to offer advice or be able to tell you who to get in touch with. Your local Library will also have books on home maintenance and DIY.

Disputes with builders - contact any trade or professional organisation, which your builder is a member of. If you think you have been treated unfairly or dishonestly contact Trading Standards on 01234 228280. For other disputes that can't be resolved by negotiation, you may have to contact the Citizens Advice Bureau or a solicitor.

Online advice - there are a number of websites that provide more details instructions and tips:

www.DIYnot.com/ - have hundreds of information pages that go into great detail on subjects including decorating, electrics, floors and stairs, home security, insulation, outdoor projects, plumbing, roofing and guttering, safety, tools and materials, windows and doors and woodwork.

<http://www.thediyworld.co.uk/> - contains useful information about electrics, security and joinery as well as a glossary of terms.

www.diyfixit.com/ - is another site with hundreds of pages of DIY tips as well as advice on insurance and safety.

www.diydoctor.org.uk/ - not only provides information on how to do a wide range of tasks but has useful advice for planning and carrying out a DIY or maintenance project.

How To Check Your Home

Inspecting your home regularly could help you spot a problem before it causes serious damage. Many problems can often be put right cheaply, but if left, could end up being expensive. The exterior of a house is permanently exposed to the elements and any damage could be eliminated through simple home maintenance and repair. The interior of a house also needs to be well maintained. Appliances using gas and electricity can be dangerous if not regularly serviced.

Electrics

Do switches spark or crackle when turned on or off? Are there any burn marks on sockets? Are any sockets, switches or light fittings loose, broken or cracked? Are all cables and plugs wired securely without any cracks, splits or coloured wires visible? Do fuses blow or light bulbs only last a very short time? If yes, call an approved **NICEIC** registered electrician.

Gas appliances and Central heating

All gas appliances should be serviced once a year by a CORGI registered gas fitter to make sure they are safe. Burn marks on heating elements, or on walls behind or to the sides of gas fires, and flames that are more yellow or orange than the normal blue with yellow tip flame may indicate a problem. This should be checked and put right immediately by an approved **CORGI** registered gas fitter.

Plumbing

Are taps dripping or supply or waste pipes leaking? Repairs at an early stage could be quite cheap but, if left, faults could develop which will be expensive to put right. What may appear to be leaking to a cold water pipe may

be no more than condensation. Dry out and warm the wet area of the pipe. If there is a leak, water should re-appear immediately.

Can I Do The Work Myself ?

The following is general advice and whether to do a job yourself or call in someone else will depend on your physical ability, technical know-how, time available, personal finance, availability of tools and, in many cases, how comfortable you feel at the top of a ladder!

Only carry out Electrical work if you feel competent to do it.

If in doubt consult a qualified electrician.

Any work required to Gas appliances including fires, heaters and gas central heating must be carried out by a qualified person.

Do-It-Yourself Hazards

Don't forget the dangers to you and others when you tackle those DIY jobs.

Hand tools

Always use the right tool for the job – it is safer and you'll get better results. Give each one a quick check before you use it, mend broken tools right away or get another. Don't be tempted to do a temporary repair – a loose hammer head could fly off in use!

Power tools

If hiring tools, use a company who gives out full instructions with their equipment. Ask to be shown how the tool should be used.

Never use in damp or wet conditions.

Ladders

Before use always check that the ladder is -sound and in good condition, - clean and dry, - not missing any rungs, - not bent or warped, - not rusted or corroded, - not dented, - rungs are not bent, - caps and rubber fittings are in good condition and - foot pads are in good condition. Only use it on a firm level surface ideally with someone at the bottom to steady it. Lash it at the top if possible. The best rule to follow to set it at the safest angle is one foot out for every four feet up

In An Emergency

If you smell gas – open windows, do not switch lights or sockets on or off, don't light a match or lighter, put out cigarettes, check that all gas appliances are off.

Turn the gas off at the meter and call: Transco on 0800 111999.

Leaking/burst pipes - turn off the water at the mains stop tap and turn all taps on to drain the system. Do it yourself or call a plumber.

Security And Safety

Doors – when replacing locks fit a 5-lever deadlock and security bolts to your outside doors and a security chain and spy-hole to your front door.

Windows – fit window locks to your windows. These are available in a variety of types. The best ones are those that require a key to open them. Make sure you know where to find the keys so you can escape in an emergency.

Entries – you are less likely to be burgled if access to the rear of your house is restricted. Persuade all those who share an entry to contribute towards a gate that can be locked.

Smoke alarms - fit smoke alarms upstairs and downstairs on your route out of the house. These will give you enough warning to escape before a fire really takes hold. Don't forget to test them regularly to make sure they are working properly.

Party walls in attics - make sure there is no gap in the wall in the attic between your roof space and those next door. Brick built firewalls within the roof space between properties stop roof fires spreading.

Know your escape plan – think through how everyone in the house will escape if there was a fire. Wherever the fire is make sure everyone, even children, know what to do when the alarm goes off – especially at night.

Don't let burglars know you are out - leave a light on if you go out and are leaving the house empty at night. When you go away on holiday cancel the milk and papers and have a neighbour move the post to where it can't be seen from the door or windows.

The information provided in this leaflet is taken from the Home Maintenance Guide from North Herts District Council and produced courtesy of the Environment Department, Hertfordshire County Council and Environmental Services, Mid Bed District Council.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this leaflet, please contact the Environmental Health Officer (Health & Safety) on 08452-304040.