

The Inspector's Corner: Getting the best return when selling your home

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With a little care many of the systems in your home will last much longer, saving you money in repair costs and help ensure you get the most for your home. As a home inspector I regularly see homes where neglect causes the early failure of items such as the furnace. Neglect or deferred maintenance also has the unintended affect of devaluing the property at the time it goes on the market and during the inspection process. Most homeowners don't realize that ignoring the required maintenance will shorten the life of items like appliances by 50%. In many cases a homeowner with average skills can accomplish this maintenance.

Periodic maintenance, as prescribed by the appliance manufacturers and home builders, can extend the life of these items, giving you more time before you must consider the repair-vs.-replace conundrum. According to the National Association of Home Builders, the average life span of these household items is:

- Water heater: 10 to 15 years
- Central air conditioning: 8 to 10 years
- Septic system: 25 to 30 years
- Smoke detector: 10 years
- Driveway (asphalt): 5 to 8 years
- Roof (asphalt shingles): 10 years, depending upon intensity of local weather conditions
- Deck (wood): 10 to 12 years, depending upon weather conditions/wear and tear

Let's look at the maintenance for those items:

- With water heaters the maintenance is simple, once a year several gallons should be drained from the tank. This should remove any sediment that has built up. Be careful as the water will be between 125 and 140 degrees.
- The most common issue I see with forced air furnaces is not changing the filter on a regular basis especially when the heater is located in the crawl space or attic. A dirty air filter reduces the airflow to the operating equipment and forces it to run longer to heat and cool your home. If you also have air-conditioning you should check your filter every 6 months to ensure it is kept clean. Have a heating contractor perform a yearly maintenance check on your furnace, venting, and cooling systems, this helps ensure they are operating at peak efficiency. If your furnace is operating at peak efficiency it will use less energy and cost less to operate. Unfortunately most people don't replace their furnace filter each year.
- The care of a septic system is quite basic. Septic tanks should be pumped on a regular basis to remove solids that could clog up the system. Trees and shrubs should not be allowed to grow into the leach field. Harsh chemicals should not be introduced into the system, as they will harm the bacterium that breaks down the waste. Heavy vehicles should not be allowed to drive over the leach field as they will compress the soil and could break the drainpipes.

- Smoke Detectors require minimal care. With each Daylight Savings time change, change the battery or better yet replace the existing batteries with the new 9volt lithium batteries. These will last 9-10 years. Whenever you change the battery, vacuum around the unit. Dust and dirt can cause false alarms as well as slow the reaction. Always remove the detectors when you are painting in the room. If you don't know the age of your smoke detectors, then consider replacing them as they are probably beyond their effective life.
- As house inspectors, we regularly see water's effect on driveways. Uncontrolled water will cause heaving and settling as well as cracks. Once a driveway cracks, a cycle starts where water will get underneath and freeze, widening the crack. Water will also cause the soil to expand further raising the slab. I have seen as much as 6 inch heaves on driveways due to this cycle. Once a crack starts on a driveway they should be sealed with silicon caulk made for that purpose.
- Roofs can be inspected from the ground with binoculars or if you can safely do so, from a ladder. Things to look for include raised, damaged or loose shingles; gaps in the flashing where the roofing and siding meet vents and flues; and the chimney (especially at the joints, caps and washes). Look for trees that are touching the roof. On a windy day tree branches can strip the shingles off of a roof. If you see any signs of damage, call a professional to repair the damage.
- Decks need regular care in Colorado's weather. Decks should be clean and sealed with a quality waterproofing sealer. Loose boards should be re-secured especially around stairs. If the wood is splitting consider sanding down the surface prior to resealing. If the wood has deteriorated consider laying a deck with a lifetime material such as Trex.

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Mountain View Property Inspections. If you would like to know more about your home go to **WWW.MVPinspection.com** If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or MVPInspection@comcast.net