

National Center for HEALTHY HOUSING

Healthy Homes Maintenance Checklist for Thermal Control Extreme Cold

A healthy home is one that is constructed, maintained, and rehabilitated in a manner that is conducive to good occupant health. To maintain a healthy home, occupants should keep it dry, clean, safe, well-ventilated, free from contaminants and pests, well-maintained, and thermally controlled.

As our climate changes, extreme weather is increasing in both intensity and frequency; for some places, this means an increased risk of extreme cold and winter weather. Exposure to cold weather can result in hypothermia or frostbite; exacerbate chronic conditions including respiratory conditions, heart disease, and high blood pressure; and can increase risk for injury. Tenants and homeowners are at heightened risk for various health problems related to prolonged exposure to excessive heat or cold when their homes do not maintain adequate temperatures. Residents who live in areas that typically experience milder winters may be especially vulnerable during extreme cold events.

This checklist provides a list of activities you can complete in your home to prepare for the possibility of extremely cold temperatures. For more information about the adverse health effects caused by extreme cold and how to prepare for and act during extreme cold events, visit our [extreme cold resource library](#). These activities are not meant to replace steps that can or should be taken in an emergency; in an extreme cold event, follow the advice of your local public health agency, and if you feel ill or recognize symptoms of illness in others, seek medical help immediately.

This checklist was adapted from the [Healthy Homes Maintenance Checklist](#). We recommend using the full checklist in conjunction with this resource to create a comprehensive list of home maintenance activities that can help ensure your home is constructed, maintained, and rehabilitated in a manner that is conducive to good occupant health.

Spring
Fall
Annual
As Needed
Pro Needed?

THERMAL COMFORT

These activities will help ensure that your home stays comfortable during extreme temperatures.

Windows and Doors

Remove and replace any cracked or broken glass.	●	●			
Look for signs of water leakage at doors and windowsills and repair or replace as needed.	●	●			
Check for air leaks and caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.	●	●			
Verify that windows and doors are operational.	●	●			

Cooling/Air Conditioning Units

Replace or clean air conditioner filters (for central air, use MERV 11 filters).	●	●			
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Heating Units

Clean and tune the furnace, boiler, water heaters, and heat pump.		●			●
Replace or clean filters for a warm-air furnace (MERV 11).	●	●			
Inspect the chimney and clean if needed.*		●			
Inspect the fireplace for debris and damage.*		●			

*These maintenance actions are intended to prepare for emergency fireplace use in extremely cold weather. They should not be considered a recommendation to use fireplaces or wood stoves when not necessary and when other heating means are available.

(Checklist continued on reverse...)

For more information, visit NCHH's Extreme Heat and Extreme Cold "Prepare and Act" pages.

PROTECTING ATTIC INSULATION

In a fully insulated home, these activities will not be as critical and can be seen as a secondary way to maintain thermal comfort. They will also help control additional hazards like moisture that can cause other healthy housing issues.

	Spring	Fall	Annual	As Needed	Pro Needed?
Attic Inspection					
Ensure that insulation is in place.		●			
Verify that any bath and kitchen exhaust fan ductwork in the attic is intact and vents outside.		●			
Inspect attic for signs of roof leaks.		●			
Inspect the attic intake and exhaust vents.		●			
Roof Inspection					
Ensure that the roofing is in good condition.		●			
Inspect the chimney, valley, plumbing vent, and skylight flashing for damage or leaks.		●			
Gutter Inspection					
Inspect for icicles and ice dams.				●	
Make sure gutters are fastened securely.		●			
Clear gutters of leaves and debris.		●			

OUTDOOR SAFETY/FALL HAZARDS

These activities will help prevent accidents and safety hazards that can occur outside during winter weather.

	Spring	Fall	Annual	As Needed	Pro Needed?
Make sure water doesn't drain and freeze onto sidewalks, porches, or driveways.		●			
Secure outdoor railings.		●			
Seal cracks in sidewalks, porches, stairs, and driveways.		●			
Trim or clear trees/branches that could fall on the home.		●			
Drain and store hoses.		●			

PREPARING FOR EXTREME TEMPERATURES

These activities include ways to prepare your home ahead of extreme temperatures or weather. This list is not inclusive of other ways you can prepare yourself and your family. For additional ways to prepare (such as ensuring you have medications on hand, having enough food and water), see our Extreme Heat or Extreme Cold "Prepare and Act" pages.

	Spring	Fall	Annual	As Needed	Pro Needed?
If using a space heater, select the correct size for your space and maintain the unit properly. Do not operate the heater atop furniture, near water, drapes, or bedding. Avoid using extension cords or running power cords beneath rugs or carpets.		●			
Check that generators work properly and are the appropriate distance away from the home (20 feet away from any windows, doors, or vents). Do not operate if wet.		●			
Prepare window coverings.		●			
Winterize pipes and outdoor pools.		●			

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

These activities will help keep your indoor air clean, which is especially important when you need to spend extra time inside during extreme weather events.

	Spring	Fall	Annual	As Needed	Pro Needed?
Ventilation/Dryer Vents					
Verify that the exhaust ducts are clear (fans are moving air).	●	●			
Verify that the bath and kitchen fans are operational.	●	●			
Clean dryer vents and screens.	●	●			
Clean exhaust fan outlets and screens.	●				
Clean outdoor air intakes and screens.		●			●
Dehumidifiers and Air Cleaners					
Replace or clean air cleaner filters per the manufacturer's instructions.	●				
Alarms					
Make sure smoke and CO alarms are operational	●	●			
For alarms without 10-year batteries, replace batteries twice per year	●	●			



This resource was made possible through a contract between the National Environmental Health Association and the National Center for Healthy Housing, funded through cooperative agreement NU38OT000300-04-05 between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Environmental Health Association.

July 2022