

# THE 10 MOST COMMON HOMEOWNER MISTAKES

Do you tend to take better care of your automobile than your house? That could be a costly mistake. Simple, inexpensive maintenance chores that are ignored today often lead to major, expensive maintenance headaches tomorrow. And if problems aren't discovered until you're ready to trade in your home, they could take a big bite out of your profits.

1. Let's take furnace filters as an example. You can spend \$5 or \$10 on a permanent filter, or buy cheap throwaways for about \$1. But if you don't buy and use one or the other, you may have to spend thousands. Accumulated dust and debris on the furnace and filter can shorten their life expectancies by requiring the motor and fan to work harder to pull the air through the filter. You could find yourself forking over several hundred dollars to replace the fan and motor. Or you would need \$1,000-\$3,000 to replace the entire furnace. Replacing filthy filters leads the "Top Ten List" of maintenance items most often neglected by homeowners.

Here are the other nine. Note that most involve water, which is usually noted as the primary cause of deterioration of a property.

2. In 75% of the properties inspected, the caulking between the tub and surrounding wall (or shower pan and shower walls) is either deteriorated or missing altogether. If not corrected, this condition will allow water to migrate behind the walls, promoting dry rot and mildew. Eventually, the wall will fail. And the removal of tile walls can run as high as \$5,000.

3. Inoperable, improperly fitted or non-weather-stripped windows and doors are discovered in about 60% of the houses that are 20 or more years old. Windows and doors that do not open and close properly can be life threatening if they are needed as an escape route. In addition, climate control problems can be created if they are loose and improperly sealed, allowing conditioned air to escape. Not only does this drive up your monthly heating and cooling bills, but it also forces your furnace and air conditioner to run overtime to attain the desired temperature, shortening their life span significantly.

4. Leaking water supply valves under sinks and faucets, found in 50% of the homes we inspect, cause the floor (or wall if the faucet also is leaking) to deteriorate. If neglected, it could cost anywhere from \$200 to \$1,000 to repair the damage, depending on how long the leak has been ignored.
5. Ivy growing up the side of your house or trees that hang over your roof can be beautiful, but both are terribly damaging. Yet, these conditions are present in about 40% of the homes we inspect. Retained water in vegetation contributes to accelerated deterioration and rot: Ivy's root system is so strong that it can move mortar or get behind siding and pop it out, and leaves deposited on a roof are a breeding ground for degeneration. Depending on the extent of growth, you may have to re-roof or re-side your house at a cost of several thousand dollars. At best, your roof's life expectancy will be reduced by 20%.
6. About 35% of the houses inspected have grading problems. Even if the lot was graded properly when the house was built, - it should slope away from the structure - the grade can be expected to shift over time. The cause is usually heavy rain and erosion from over watering shrubs placed too close to the house. But sometimes the granular soil next to the foundation simply settles. If the ground within ten feet of the house slopes toward the house, water will pond adjacent to the building. This can be eliminated by a few wheelbarrows of dirt and some spadework. But if water is allowed to remain over a period of time, it will migrate under the structure, create conditions conducive to wood destroying insect infestation and weaken the foundation.
7. A third of all houses have gutters and downspouts clogged by roof debris or dead vegetation. This will allow water to back up on the roof, causing not only the roof to deteriorate more quickly, but also erosion that leads to a negative grade at the foundation.
8. The exhaust fan in bathrooms without windows is either disconnected or inoperable in one out of every three houses inspected. This will allow condensation to accumulate, causing moisture damage. Eventually, the walls and flooring can rot out.

- 9.** Fifteen percent of the houses inspected have either worn out caulking or none at all. Deteriorated or missing caulking on exterior walls where dissimilar materials meet can allow water to intrude into wall cavities, where it will cause the framing to rot.

Caulking wears out. It shrinks, cracks, blisters and hardens, so it needs to be evaluated annually. If it goes unchecked and, when necessary, replaced, you may end up replacing the sill plates, interior studs and framing at a cost of several thousand dollars.

- 10.** If you don't want to spend \$2,000-\$3,000 to replace your air conditioning system, make sure the condensing unit outside is ventilated adequately. In ten to fifteen percent of the houses inspected, they are not. Landscaping, overgrowth, vegetation, aesthetic walls and enclosures all can limit or prevent the condenser's ability to take in and release air for cooling purposes. If that is the case, the motor and fan must work harder, shortening the unit's life expectancy. The easiest remedy is to remove the obstruction. The data plate on the unit lists the proper clearance specifications.