

Remember the 4 R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Repair

In many locations the temperature and leaves are already beginning to fall. September 22nd is the first day of Autumn, a perfect time to start your 'Fall Cleaning'.

Here are some suggestions to make your home safer and reduce your energy bills.

Clean and test the furnace for an annual cleaning because over the past 12 months it can collect dirt and debris which affects its performance and could even cause a fire. Do it now before you really need to turn the heat on. Check your owner's manual for instructions on how to clean it or call a furnace maintenance company. If you have a gas furnace, have it professionally inspected once a year.

Move furniture or any obstructions from vents, baseboard heaters, registers on the floor or radiators so that air moves freely. This is also a good time to vacuum these areas to remove any dust or debris. If you have a radiator place a reflecting panel behind it. You can purchase one at a home center or make one yourself with a plywood panel and aluminum foil.

Remove window air conditioners which are not needed during the winter months. If they cannot be removed, seal them with caulk or tape and cover them with an airtight, insulated jacket.

Vacuum the refrigerator coils to keep the compressor running efficiently. It's also a good time to check that the refrigerator is level ... the door should automatically swing shut instead of staying open. Check the seal on the door ... try closing it on a dollar bill. If you can pull the bill out easily, it's time to replace the gaskets. Another tip for running the refrigerator efficiently is do not over fill it. Allowing room for cool air to circulate will keep everything at the right temperature.

Clean the ducts and area behind the clothes dryer. Don't forget to clean the filter after each use and occasionally, give it a good wash.

Check windows for proper caulking. If you have single pane windows, add storm windows. Even a plastic film over windows will reduce heat loss.

Check doors for weather stripping and replace as necessary. If drafts sneak in under exterior doors, replace the threshold or block the drafts with a rolled-up towel or blanket.

Electrical outlets, especially on outside walls, and light fixtures are prime places for cold air to leak into your home. Add foam gaskets behind covers and switch plates, and use safety plugs in unused outlets. Be sure to shut off the power at the fuse box or circuit panel before doing this.

Install foam covers over outside water spigots to prevent freezing. Check for water leaks both inside and outside.

If you have a fireplace autumn is a good time to have the chimney cleaned and get vent systems checked.

If your home has **no sidewall insulation**, place heavy furniture like bookshelves, dressers and sofas along exterior walls. This will help block cold air.

Clean the roof gutters and make sure downspouts are pointed away from the house. Check your roof for any missing or damaged tiles or shingles.

Check the air pressure in your car tires - make sure that they are properly inflated. Cooler temperatures lower tire pressure which may, lower fuel efficiency.

As the autumn leaves begin to fall, consider raking them and use them as mulch to protect your plants during the winter months, or add them to a compost pile.

If you follow these suggestions the good news is that you will reduce your electric and heat bills considerably.

Don't forget – "Together we can make a difference."

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