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Chimney Maintenance

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This is the time of year when our concerns turn to the coming winter months. Screens are exchanged for freshly painted storm windows for some, while others merely slide the screens up and the storm panels down. Our weekends are spent with caulking gun in hand, trying to close up all those nooks and crannies that stole our heating dollars last year. We walk around the house looking at eye level, feeling confident that our guard is up for the invasion of Jack Frost.

We often neglect to look upwards toward the roof to see what condition our chimneys are in. It doesn't matter if you heat with wood, oil, or gas. Your chimney plays an important role in your heating system. It can rob just as much of your heating dollars as a poorly sealed door or window. Chimneys should be inspected from top to bottom before the heating season is upon us. There's nothing worse than having to shut down the furnace in the middle of winter to have your chimney serviced. The time is now to have it checked, not a month from now.

Have a qualified contractor or chimney technician check your chimney inside and out. Any loose or sandy mortar should be removed and the joints should be tuck pointed where needed. The masonry cap joint between the flue liner should be checked very closely for hairline cracks and coved away from the liner if needed. This area is very critical, being a good source of leakage. If your chimney has no real masonry cap and only supports a thin layer of mortar over brick, you may want to consider having a proper masonry cap formed and poured on your chimney.

Masonry caps should extend over the brick. In other words, the cap should be the widest point of the exposed chimney. This will allow any dripping moisture to drip away from the brick and mortar, therefore not running along and soaking into any of the joints. Mortar joints are no more than stone sponges. This is why your next step should be to seal the entire masonry surfaces of the chimney with a high quality, heavy duty masonry sealer. There are a number of good brands on the market today such as "Chem Stop" or "Thompsons Water Seal".

These sealers help guard against the soaking action and bridge the hairline cracks too small for mortar to seal.

The flashing should be your next area of inspection. This is probably the most neglected area, but the most widely accounted source of roof/chimney leakage problems. Make sure all nails are set and secure. The flashing should then be sealed with a good grade of fibrated mastic. The fresh seal should then be lined with fiberglass mesh or mat. Another coating of the mastic can then be applied. The matting between the two layers of mastic helps prevent against cracking of the seal caused by extreme

temperature changes or "thermal shock".

The next step should be to make sure the liner is clean. If you are doing this project yourself, make sure you use a proper sized and shaped chimney sweeping brush. Burlap bags full of chains or window weights cause damage to the clay tile liners and may cause blockage from cracked or falling pieces of the liner. The cleanout door in the basement should not be blocked by debris. It should be accessible for cleaning throughout the heating season.

The last step will be to cap this project. Install a good, strong metal flue cap on the top of your chimney. We recommend stainless steel. However, there are other good caps to consider. These caps not only act as spark arrestors, they also improve your draft in some cases and help keep birds and rodents out of your chimney.

Now that this project is complete, whether you did it yourself or had a qualified contractor do it for you, you can sleep better knowing that your chimney is solid and safe.

We hope this information has been helpful to you! If you have any further questions, please visit our website at www.aroundyourhouse.net, or contact Jim at Around Your House.

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