

Preparing Facilities for Spring

As winter draws to a close, it is important to inspect and prepare buildings for the upcoming spring and summer months. The harsh weather conditions of winter can leave behind deterioration and problems with the building's gutters, downspouts and air conditioning systems.

Gutters and Downspouts

Malfunctioning gutters and downspouts can lead to roof damage or erosion problems in the areas that surround the building. Pools of water from leaking or ineffective gutters and downspouts can cause flooding problems on the ground and in basements and other low levels. To avoid these problems, gutters and downspouts should be inspected and repaired on an annual basis. Below are some of the problems to look for along with tips for repairing these issues.

Dirt, Debris and Settling

Nearby trees, pebbles from asphalt shingles and dirt can cause gutters to clog. In addition to the hazard of clogging, the dirt and debris weighs down the gutters, causing them to settle. When the gutters settle, the added weight of snow melt and rain prevents them from draining properly, causing them to pull away from the roof. When this happens, there is a chance that the wood on the roof may begin to rot.

To determine if the gutters have settled, take a look at the corners during the next rain or spray a water hose onto the roof. Watch to see if the corners begin to leak. If they leak, the gutters are not draining correctly and need to be repaired.

In addition, have gutters cleaned on an annual basis to prevent clogging and settling.

Loose Downspouts

Another common maintenance issue is downspouts that break loose or become disconnected from the gutter itself. Check the building for loose downspouts. To fix loose downspouts, push the downspout back together and drill a couple small holes into the two pieces. Fasten the pieces together with sheet metal screws.

Overflowing Rain Gutters

This is often the result of a clogged gutter or downspout. To fix the problem, clean out the area of the gutter where the clogging is occurring. In some situations, the cause is due to having too small of gutters to handle the rain water. If this is the case, larger rain gutters should be installed.

Pooling Water Near Downspouts

To prevent water from pooling around the downspout and building, make sure it runs off well into the yard or another area away from the building. Use a downspout extension or other flexible tubing to re-route the runoff away from the building.

Air Conditioning Maintenance

An appliance you won't want to be without when the first warm days of spring arrive is the air conditioning unit. The information below is excerpted from the U.S. Department of Energy and outlines the steps you can take to maintain your building's air conditioning system for peak performance during the spring and summer months.

An air conditioner's filters, coils, and fins require regular maintenance for the unit to function effectively and efficiently throughout its years of service. Neglecting necessary maintenance ensures a steady decline in air conditioning performance while energy use steadily increases.

Air Conditioner Filters

The most important maintenance task that will ensure the efficiency of your air conditioner is to routinely replace or clean its filters. Clogged, dirty filters block normal air flow and reduce a system's efficiency significantly. With normal air flow obstructed, air that bypasses the filter may carry dirt directly into the evaporator coil and impair the coil's heat-absorbing capacity. Keeping the filter clean can lower your air conditioner's energy consumption by 5%-15%.

For central air conditioners, filters are generally located somewhere along the return duct's length. Common filter locations are in walls, ceilings, furnaces, or in the air conditioner itself. Room air conditioners have a filter mounted in the grill that faces into the room.

Some types of filters are reusable; others must be replaced. They are available in a variety of types and efficiencies. Clean or replace your air conditioning system's filter or filters every month or two during the cooling season. Filters may need more frequent attention if the air conditioner is in constant use, is subjected to dusty conditions, or you have fur-bearing pets in the house.

Air Conditioner Coils

The air conditioner's evaporator coil and condenser coil collect dirt over their months and years of service. A clean filter prevents the evaporator coil from soiling quickly. In time, however, the evaporator coil will still collect dirt. This dirt reduces air flow and insulates the coil, reducing its ability to absorb heat. To avoid this problem, check your evaporator coil every year and clean it as necessary.

Outdoor condenser coils can also become very dirty if the outdoor environment is dusty or if there is foliage nearby. You can easily see the condenser coil and notice if dirt is collecting on its fins.

Be sure to minimize dirt and debris near the condenser unit. Dryer vents, falling leaves, and lawn mowers are all potential sources of dirt and debris. Cleaning the area around the coil, removing any debris, and trimming foliage back at least 2 feet (0.6 meters) allows for adequate air flow around the condenser.

Coil Fins

The aluminum fins on evaporator and condenser coils are easily bent and can block air flow through the coil. Air conditioning wholesalers sell a tool called a "fin comb" that will comb these fins back into nearly original condition.

Condensate Drains

Occasionally pass a stiff wire through the unit's drain channels. Clogged drain channels prevent a unit from reducing humidity, and the resulting excess moisture may discolor walls or carpeting.

Window Seals for Room Air Conditioners

At the start of each cooling season, inspect the seal between the air conditioner and the window frame to ensure it makes contact with the unit's metal case. Moisture can damage this seal, allowing cool air to escape from the building.

-Information excerpted from 5 Simple Gutter and Downspout Maintenance Tips by Terry Edwards, www.ezinearticles.com; Gutter and Downspout Maintenance—What You Need to Know by Terry Edwards, www.streetdirectory.com; and www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home/space_heating_cooling/index.cfm.myto.



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