

Your New Home Care Plan

Even the smallest, simplest home contains thousands of parts. Each behaves in predictable ways, and those behaviors result in maintenance tasks for homeowners. Protecting the beauty and value of your investment begins on the first day of ownership. Begin by reviewing the maintenance information your builder provides and all manufacturer's materials you receive. Though you have operated similar products in previous homes, minor changes can be significant.

Make prevention the hallmark of your home care plan. Regular inspection and attention prevents unnecessary work and expense. Prepare by collecting the needed tools and materials. Maintenance is faster and easier if your supplies are conveniently at hand. As you plan the care of your home, think in terms of the following activities-

>PROTECTING. Habits that prevent damage such as scratches, chips, cuts, burns, stains, gouges, and scrapes preserve the appearance and life of the cosmetic surfaces of your home.

>CLEANING. To counter the accumulated effects of time and normal living activities, regular cleaning and attention is also essential. Manufacturers may recommend (or caution you against) using particular cleaning products (for example, because of abrasiveness).

>ADJUSTING AND LUBRICATING. A home contains many moving parts. Through use, some of these get out of adjustment or require lubrication. Generally, silicone or graphite products make good lubricants; oil base products become sticky and attract dirt.

>REPLACING CONSUMABLE PARTS. Light bulbs, filters, and batteries (in smoke detectors) will eventually need to be replaced; the exact timing depends on use.

>INSPECTION AND PREVENTATIVE ROUTINES. Consider the type and frequency of attention each component of your home will need. Become familiar with the manufacturer's recommended maintenance routine for each product.

DO -IT-YOURSELF OR PROFESSIONAL?

Some homeowners enjoy taking care of their home. Others prefer to pay someone else to do the work. Either way is fine. Consider cost, your schedule, motivation, and skill level. Decide which items you will do and which you will hire others to do.

LANDSCAPING

Beautiful yards result from many years of work. If your builder provided landscaping, you have escaped only the first round of work. Yards require consistent attention to flourish. If you are installing everything yourself, keep these suggestions in mind-

Information provided by:

Builders Association of Eastern Connecticut

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- >Create a plan that you can implement in stages.
- >Consider a Xeriscape (low water) approach.
- >Use native plants rather than exotics.
- >Cover soil as soon as possible to prevent erosion.
- >Maintain proper slope away from you home for good drainage.
- >Make provisions for efficient irrigation.
- >Install edgings around decorative rock or bark beds in such a way as to permit proper water drainage.

CRITTERS

The county records office recognizes your ownership. Field mice, woodpeckers, ants, bees, and other indigneous life may not. Whether entertaining or threatening, one thing these creatures have in common is that they are yours to contend with. A notable exception is termite control. In some areas, builders treat the foundation for termites and provide you with a certificate confirming that treatment. In this case your responsibility in renewing this treatment when appropriate.

EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION: SETTLING

Building materials expand and contract because of changes in temperature and humidity. Dissimilar materials, for example wood trim installed over drywall, expand and contract at different rates in response to these fluctuations. The result can be a slight seperation between the two materials. You may see evidence of expansion and contraction in drywall cracks and nail pops, seperations where moldings meet walls, or at mitered corners of door casings. Doors may need adjustmentss because of these changes. Many people refer to these effects as settling.

CAULK

Over time caulk dries, shrinks, and cracks. Once this occurs its effectiveness diminishes; it no longer provides a seal against moisture and air infiltration. Maintaining caulking will be a routine task throughout the life of your home.

CONCRETE

Expect some minor cracking in your concrete flatwork-driveway, patio, and so on. Concrete cracks result from shrinkage during curing (approximately half an inch in a 10-foot width), temperature changes, or soil movement. While cracking cannot be entirely prevented, you can minimize cracking if you remember the following hints.

- >Maintain good drainage away from concrete slabs.
- >Fill low spouts or settled areas near concrete slabs.

- >Seal cracks with a concrete caulking.
- >Remove ice and snow as soon as possible.
- >Protect concrete from de-icing agents.
- >Keep heavy vehicles off your drive (such as a moving van or dump truck).

SYSTEMS

The mechanical systems in your new home are likely to perform differently from those in your previous homes. Each home is unique in the way it interacts with wind currents, passive solar effects, its orientation to its neighbors, and surrounding plant life. Each installation also varies even if the same trade contractor does the work.

Officials update government requirements and codes regularly. The result is that your new home will have to comply with rules that may not have existed when your last home was built. For instance, federally mandated water-savings devices are now required in every new home. One example of such devices is the low-flush toilet, which has been shown by government studies to save water, even though homeowners sometimes need to flush them more than once. Builders must comply with the requirement in spite of the occasional inconvenience to the owner.

Become familiar with the operation of your new systems to maximize their efficiency and your family's comfort. Know where all main safety shut-offs are for water, electricity, and gas.

VENTILATION

Homes today are built more tightly than ever. This tightness saves energy dollars, but it creates a potential concern. Condensation, cooking odors, radon, carbon monoxide, and other indoor pollutants may accumulate. Develop the habit of using mechanical and passive methods available for ventilating your home:

- >Don't interfere with the fresh air supply to your furnace.
- >Run the hood or exhaust fan when you are cooking and the bath fans when the bathrooms are in use.
- >Open windows when weather permits.
- >Avoid excessive burning of scented candles. The soot they produce can collect on surfaces in your home and is sometimes impossible to remove.

PAINT

Years ago paint contained chemicals such as lead that made it dangerous, especially to young people. Increased awareness of these dangers and corresponding government regulations have produced paint formulas that are safer but not as washable. Touching up painted surfaces usually produces more satisfactory results than scrubbing.

WARRANTY

As the homeowner, you are responsible for normal maintenance. But if part of the home behaves in a way that exceeds the warranty tolerance or if an installer erred in assembling materials, the materials and workmanship warranty applies. For instance, carpet requires regular vacuuming to look its best. This task is maintenance and therefore your job. If clumps of the yard pull out revealing the backing, the material is defective. The manufacturer is obligated to your builder to replace it. If a seam comes apart, the workmanship is faulty. The installation company's contract with your builder obligates the installer to correct the problem. You can maximize the protection from the warranties you receive with your new home if you

>Read and retain all warranty documents.

>Provide the recommended maintenance for all parts of your property.

>Follow claim procedures carefully.

>Maintain an accurate history of all work done on your home.

NON EMERGENCY SERVICE

Some builders suggest you report warranty items as you notice them. Others ask that you keep a list and submit claims at one or more checkpoints. Builders who follow this procedure typically schedule the first checkpoint for 30 to 90 days after move-in and may send you a reminder near the end of the warranty period. However, remembering the expiration date of your warranty coverage is your responsibility, and you should always report warranty items in writing for the sake of accuracy in record-keeping and to protect your rights under the warranty.

The checkpoint procedure intends to produce more efficient service for all homeowners. When the builder can organize service activities according to a predictable schedule, everyone benefits from faster response times. However, this approach is not intended to deny you service. Between the builder's suggested checkpoints, if an item requires attention, send a request for repair.

Upon receipt of a warranty request, the builder may schedule an inspection appointment with you to decide who should provide the repair. Your builder provides warranty action directly, through an employee or indirectly, through a trade contractor. The response time for new home warranty repairs can range from the same day (for an emergency) to several weeks (if a part needs to be ordered).

Service work typically occurs Monday through Friday, between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. Some Saturday or evening appointments may be available, but these are limited. If your builder does not accept keys or if you prefer not to provide one, the service person will contact you to set an appointment. You have a responsibility to arrange access to your home during normal business hours. However, you are under no obligation to allow anyone into your home without an appointment.

EMERGENCY SERVICE

Fortunately, emergencies do not occur often in new homes. When they do, most builders wel-

come a report by phone. Builders typically define emergencies as

>Total loss of heat

>Total loss of electricity

>Plumbing leak that requires you to shut off the entire water supply

>Total loss of water

>Any condition that endangers the occupants or the home

Some builders arrange to have qualified staff members rotate after hours on-call responsibility.

Others provide homeowners with emergency phone numbers for the critical trade contractors: plumber, electrician, and heating contractor. In an after-hours or weekend emergency, call the appropriate trade contractor or the builder's emergency number as explained by your builder. No matter whom you call in an emergency, follow-up in writing to your builder so that your file is complete.

Homeowners usually think that a roof leak is an emergency. However, roof leak repairs can only be done when the roof is dry. Most builders accept reports of roof leaks by phone, and they will schedule repairs as soon as weather permits. After the repairmen correct it, everyone waits for a rain to test it. After severe weather, notify your homeowner insurance company if you suspect any storm damage to the roof. One sure sign of roof damage is seeing pieces of shingles in your yard.

KITCHEN APPLIANCE WARRANTIES

Appliance manufacturers work directly with you if repairs are needed. You find service numbers in their uses and care booklets. If you need to contact an appliance manufacturer, prepare to supply the model and serial number of the appliance. You find these numbers on a sticker or metal plate attached to the appliance. Activate manufacturer warranties by completing and mailing any registration allows the manufacturer to reach you in the event of a product recall.

INTERPRETATION OF GUIDELINES

Although warranty and maintenance are neither synonymous nor interchangeable, the boundary between the two can be fuzzy. Too many possible items exist to have a written guideline for everything. Some items are subjective and setting a measureable guideline for them is difficult.

Most builders temper a literal interpretation of written limited warranty guidelines with common sense and often exceed those guidelines. Yet builders do deny service on items excluded from coverage or when the warranty has expired. The guidelines you can count on are those in writing or shown in the builders models. Study the builder's limited warranty, warranty guidelines, and your maintenance responsibilities carefully.

If you disagree with a warranty decision or are dissatisfied with service work, let your builder know in writing. Include a brief and objective history of the situation. End with a request that the builder inspect the item and discuss the matter.

Few products combine science, technology, art, and sweat as a new home does. With informed

expectations, you can enjoy the building process and love the end result. Your home is more than an investment. It is an expression of your personality, a source of pride, and a haven from the outside world. Few things compare to the satisfaction of turning the key in the door of your well-cared for home at the end of they day.