

TIP OF THE MONTH:

The Rain is Coming – Don't Delay Your Roof Maintenance

By Jim Straub, Oregon Rental Housing Association Legislative Director

One of the biggest “delayed maintenance” items I see on rental properties (and one of landlords’ biggest exposures to property damage) is roof maintenance and repairs. Not much can do greater long-term damage to your investment than a leaky roof, and do-it-yourself maintenance is easy and inexpensive if you or a trusted friend is able-bodied and willing to get a little dirty.

I like to go around and inspect the roofs on all of my places after the last leaves have fallen from the trees but before the big rains hit. This is usually around November. Go after you have had several dry days in a row so any clogged gutters have had a chance to slowly drain.

First, I inspect around the roof vents & pipe flashings for cracks. (Never walk in the valleys or on the ridges of roofs, as this can actually create leaks.) Leaf or moss build up in valleys or around vent pipes and roof vents is actually a very common spot for leaks. Make sure these areas stay very clean. If you find debris, never use a pressure washer to remove it. This will shorten the life span of your roof.

I use a leaf blower to clean the debris off of the roof and to clean the gutters. This can be a bit messy until you get the hang of it, and even then it's still little messy. I like the leaf blower, because I can do a whole house in about 15 minutes and I'm not stooping or constantly going up and down a ladder. I feel the little bit of mess outweighs the risk of falling off the roof. If you get any debris on the house or walkway, just grab a hose and spray it off before it dries.

Moss on the roof is not your friend. Instead of using name brand moss control agents you buy at the hardware store, buy the active ingredient in bulk. This is what all the roofing professionals do. The active ingredient is zinc sulfate. Make sure you get the powder and not the granule. I buy mine at Gray's Garden Center in Eugene (call and verify for current prices). You may want to buy early, because store supplies can get a bit short that time of year. It is a big bag, but you should get 6 to 8 houses out of it. All you need to do is sprinkle a little bit of the zinc sulfate along the ridgelines, and the rain will dissolve it and wash it down over the rest of the roof. If you have a lot of moss accumulation, try a direct application to the problem areas.

It is also good idea to prune back any branches that are getting close to the roof, because the branches can bend and rub against the roof in a strong wind. If you have gutters older than five or eight years, they are probably attached with long aluminum nails every two feet or so. I like to make sure they are not working their way back out. Just tapping them with a hammer a few times should do the trick.

When you are doing roof maintenance, some people use this time to do a walk through to inspect for roof and water leaks. You're at the property and have to give 24 hour notice to

enter anyway. You may as well take the opportunity to be proactive and catch any roof leaks that weren't apparent from on top of the roof. Don't count solely on your tenants to alert you of leaks.

Finally, I send a weatherization letter to all my tenants this time of year telling them what to do in the cold winter months. It may seem self-apparent, but some tenants genuinely don't know how to prepare for cold weather and some just need a quick reminder. A copy for your reference is included below.

Sample Weatherization Letter

Dear Tenant:

We are entering our cold weather period here in the Willamette Valley. I would like to remind you that it is the responsibility of the renter to weatherize his/her home and keep the water running inside the building during cold weather. The following are a few suggestions I would like to make:

1. **Plug Foundation Vents**. These are the holes around the perimeter of the house. They should be blocked off to stop wind and cold from getting under your house and to your pipes. Snug-fitting cardboard works very well for this. This will also probably help keep your house warmer.
2. **Disconnect All Outside Hoses**. Anytime outside weather is freezing all hoses on the outside of the house should be disconnected. This helps prevent your outside faucets from freezing. It is also a good idea to wrap the faucet with rags or newspaper and secure with string or rubber bands when the outside temperatures drop below freezing.
3. **Keep all Water Inside the Building Running**. It is important to keep water moving in all of the water pipes to prevent freezing. It requires more than just a drop -- keep the stream approximately the width of a pencil lead (both hot and cold) from every faucet especially when outside temperatures are freezing or below. If you are worried about wasting hot water, turn off the electric breaker to your hot water heater.
4. **Leave Cupboard Doors Open** under sinks. This allows some heat near the pipes.
5. **Washing Machine Faucets**. There are usually two short rubber pieces of hose from your faucets to your washing machine. Disconnect these from your machine and run them into the drain pipe in the wall. This will allow you to leave both of them running also.
6. **Locate Your Water Meter**. The meter is sometimes difficult to find with several inches of snow on the ground or if you are in a hurry. Be sure to note its location before you need to find it.

7. **Keep heat on** and at a reasonably warm temperature. If you are going to be gone be sure to leave the heat on and the water dripping. Also, let your landlord know if you are not going to be home for several days.

Your efforts to prevent freezing before your pipes freeze will save you both discomfort and expense. Many times it takes up to a week to get a plumber, and they will charge you approximately \$75.00 an hour.

Thank you for your efforts to maintain your home. If you have any questions, please give me a call