BUILDING PERFORMANCE

Protecting your investment

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Your property might be one of your bigger investments and there are things you can do to protect its value.

Good maintenance will help you:

- keep your property safe, healthy and durable
- keep any warranties or guarantees valid (for example, regularly cleaning claddings)
- save money, by fixing problems before they get bigger
- protect your financial investment.

Many modern homes are described as 'low maintenance', but this does not mean 'no maintenance'. There is no such thing as a maintenance-free house.

What is home maintenance?

Home maintenance includes everything from regular cleaning to repairs and replacements. It can include a job as small as changing a washer to stop a tap dripping, or as large as repainting the whole house.

All buildings require ongoing maintenance, and it is the responsibility of the building owner to ensure it is carried out in a timely manner.

Normal maintenance is defined in the Building Code as work generally recognised as necessary to achieve the expected durability for a given building element. In other words, it will help your build last as long as was expected. For example, some claddings are guaranteed to last 50 years if they are properly maintained.

The extent and nature of maintenance will depend on:

- the material or system used
- geographical location and position within the building
- the need to replace components if they wear out faster than expected.

As mentioned above, the building contractor must provide the client with information about processes and materials required to maintain any element of the building work. If the owner fails to carry out this maintenance, and a defect subsequently occurs, it will limit their ability to seek redress from the building contractor or product supplier.

You cannot claim the original workmanship was unacceptable if any issues arise:

- due to a lack of required maintenance
- due to inappropriate maintenance.

Where the correct maintenance is undertaken, but the output still fails to meet the expected performance, the building work is unacceptable.

The Building Code sets minimum requirements for the durability or lifetime of parts of a building. For example, easily replaceable non-structural items are required to be durable, with normal maintenance, for five years. However, depending on the nature of the item and its age, the owner may have redress through other avenues such as the Fair Trading Act or Consumer Guarantees Act.

Best approach

Whether you're living in your home or renting it to tenants, there are four main approaches to maintenance:

- carry out regular preventive maintenance, such as cleaning gutters, to prevent some problems from occurring
- carry out repairs as needed, preventing small problems from turning into big ones
- plan ahead for major maintenance tasks so you have the money and time available when the work is needed (for example, repainting or reroofing)
- be prepared for emergencies (for example, know where and how the water, gas and power supplies turn off. If you have tenants make sure they know too).

DIY or get the professionals

You may be able to do basic maintenance and repairs, like painting or replacing a broken window, but you need to be realistic about your limits. It might be better to hire a tradesperson and get the job done properly the first time.

By law, a professional needs to do some jobs such as gas, plumbing, drainage and some electrical work. You need a licensed building practitioner to do or supervise any building work that affects the primary structure, weathertightness or fire safety of the building.

If you're doing your own maintenance work, make sure you take the necessary health and safety precautions.

Maintenance checklist

- plan regular preventive maintenance
- budget for major maintenance tasks (including repainting)
- carry out repairs promptly to avoid larger problems developing
- know how to turn your water, gas and power supplies off
- know your limitations – get qualified help when necessary
- know what jobs you must get a professional to do (for example, restricted building work)
- get involved in your body corporate's maintenance planning
- combat dampness by insulating, ventilating and heating your home
- check mould and water stains for possible weathertightness problems
- understand the maintenance requirements of your home's cladding
- check cladding regularly for signs of water getting in
- keep drainage outlets clear on enclosed decks and balconies
- check your roof annually
- clean guttering and spouting regularly
- take adequate safety precautions when doing maintenance work.

Maintenance and body corporates

If you live in an apartment or townhouse with a body corporate you are likely to be limited in what, if any, external maintenance you can do. The best way to keep your building well maintained is to be an active member of the body corporate and make sure it has a properly funded, long-term maintenance programme to keep the building in good condition.

Major maintenance matters

Moisture

One of the main problems with New Zealand homes is the amount of moisture that collects and stays inside. Damp homes are unhealthy and harder to heat.

You can combat persistent damp in your home by:

- insulating (under the floor, in the ceiling and walls)
- ventilating (including extractor fans in bathrooms and kitchens, open windows, using a dehumidifier or forced ventilation system, keeping vents clear)
- heating (aim to keep the indoor temperature at a minimum of 16 degrees)
- replacing unflued gas heaters with electric or flued gas heaters.

Leaking pipes or condensation can cause excessive moisture.

You should treat the cause of excessive moisture at the same time as addressing its effects.

Excessive moisture can also indicate that your home is a leaky building, which could require extensive repairs.

Mould, water stains and musty smells in houses built or renovated since the early 1990s can be the first signs of a leaky or non-weathertight house. They need to be thoroughly investigated. Owners who think their homes could have weathertightness problems because of their design and construction methods should seek early expert advice.

It is important that leaky homes are repaired promptly and properly to stop further damage. Good quality early repairs mean homeowners avoid additional costs for repairing further damage. Owners of tenanted houses likely to have weathertightness issues should regularly check their properties and ask their tenants to report early signs of problems.

Signs of a leaky home (https://www.building.govt.nz/resolving-problems/resolution-options/weathertight-services/signs-of-a-leaky-home/)

Walls

Fibre-cement claddings

Modern homes with monolithic fibre-cement claddings are often sold as 'low maintenance' homes, but most of these speciality exteriors need more maintenance than a weatherboard house. Check with the cladding manufacturer, as you may be required to wash the cladding at specific intervals to keep the warranty valid. Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

It is particularly important to wash the cladding if your house is near the sea and where wall areas are sheltered from regular rain washing. It is important to use a soft brush and low-pressure hose to wash the cladding – do not use a water blaster as they can damage claddings and force water through gaps and joints.

If your home was built after the early 1990s and has any risk of being a leaky building, you need to be especially vigilant in your maintenance checks. Carry out a careful inspection of the cladding at least once a year.

The main things to look for are:

- places where water can get into the framing
- signs that water has already got in.

Water might get in:

- through holes
- through cracks
- through loose cladding
- through holes around fixings (like aerials)
- through joints that have separated
- around doors and windows
- anywhere the sealing has failed
- anywhere water can pool against the cladding.

Look for signs that moisture might be soaking into the cladding, often indicated by darker colouration along the bottom edges of the cladding.

Pay attention to vulnerable areas by:

- checking around the house to make sure the cladding is at least 175mm above the lawn or garden, or 100mm above paved surfaces
- checking pergolas, cantilevered decks, poorly formed flashings (waterproofing strips) that do not protect doors and windows, and meter boxes which are not sealed or flashed
- checking any areas where bolts, screws or handrails penetrate the cladding.

Brick houses

Most brick houses are brick veneer, with a cavity between the timber framing and the brickwork. You need to keep the drainage cavities at the base of the walls clear – check regularly that soil and plants are not blocking them.

Never let insulation material fill the cavity behind the brick veneer as this will seriously alter the weatherproofing performance of the cladding.

Concrete block houses

Most solid concrete block homes are constructed of reinforced masonry. They rely on the externally applied waterproof coating for weathertightness and this must be maintained to keep water out.

Balconies and decks

Common on apartments and many modern homes, enclosed decks and balconies require good design and regular maintenance to ensure adequate drainage. They should be built with a slope to allow water to run off to a collection point such as a downpipe. Keep drainage outlets clear of leaves and other items that might block them.

Balconies enclosed with solid walls often suffer weathertightness problems and need to be frequently checked for signs of rotting, swelling, cracks and rust around bolts and flashings.

Roofs

Once a year you should check your roof cladding, chimneys and flashings (waterproofing strips that protect vulnerable areas) to ensure problems are not developing.

Things to look for include flashings that have corroded or lifted and crumbling chimney mortar. Overhanging branches can damage roofing materials, so it's important to keep trees next to your house well-trimmed.

Check with the manufacturer of your roofing material to find out about any special maintenance requirements. For example, paint-on membranes must be re-coated every 7-10 years.

Drains and gutters

Blocked and damaged drains can cause serious flooding so it's important to contact a professional drain cleaner as soon as you become aware of any problems. Tree roots can cause clay (earthenware) drainage pipes to crack, so take care where you plant trees with extensive root systems. Guttering and spouting need to be cleaned out at least once a year as leaves can easily collect and block them.

Maintaining your home - Korean translation

[PDF 591 KB]
(https://www.building.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/projects-and-consents/home-maintenance-Korean.pdf)

Maintaining your home - Chinese translation

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