



# Maintaining your home

## A checklist to help homeowners protect their properties

Most New Zealanders' homes are their biggest investments, so it's important to protect them.

Good maintenance will:

- help keep your home safe and secure
- keep you and your family healthy
- save you money by allowing you to fix 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.

Practical, easy-to-follow information about home maintenance is available at [www.consumerbuild.org.nz](http://www.consumerbuild.org.nz) – a website jointly owned by the Consumers' Institute and the Department of Building and Housing.

### What is home maintenance?

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

### What's the best way to approach maintenance?

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*, such as repainting or reroofing, so you have the money and time available when the work is needed.
- Be *prepared for emergencies* – know where and how the water, gas and power supplies turn off, and if you have tenants make sure they know too.

### DIY or professional?

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 is better to hire a tradesperson and get the job done properly the first time around than to make costly mistakes. By law, some jobs need to be done by a professional, such as gas, plumbing, drainage and some electrical work. From November 2010, certain building work will need to be supervised or carried out by a licensed building practitioner.

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

## Will my body corporate take care of all my home maintenance?

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 yourself. 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 around indoors. 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.

You should treat the cause of excessive moisture at the same time as addressing its effects. Excessive moisture can be caused by leaking pipes or condensation. It can also indicate that your home is a leaky building, which could involve extensive repairs.

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

Practical advice on identifying and addressing weather-tightness problems is available at [www.consumerbuild.org.nz](http://www.consumerbuild.org.nz).

It is important that leaky homes are repaired promptly and properly to stop further damage. Good quality early repairs mean that homeowners avoid additional costs for repairing further damage.

Owners of tenanted houses likely to have weather-tightness issues should regularly check their properties and ask their tenants to report early signs of problems.

### 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, cracks, loose cladding, fixings (like aerials), joints that have separated, around doors and windows, anywhere where the sealing has failed, and any area where water can pool against the cladding. Look for signs that moisture might be soaking up into the cladding, often indicated by darker colouration along the bottom edges of the cladding.

Vulnerable areas to pay attention to:

- Check around the house to make sure the cladding is at least 175 mm above the lawn or garden, or 100 mm above paved surfaces
- Check pergolas, cantilevered decks, poorly formed flashings (waterproofing strips) that do not protect doors and windows, and meter boxes which are not sealed or flashed
- Check 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. Drainage outlets must be kept 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. Paint-on membranes, for example, must be regularly 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.

**See reverse for summary checklist.**

### Remember to

- Plan for regular preventive maintenance
- Budget for major maintenance tasks like 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 the law requires a professional to do
- 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

Practical, easy-to-follow information about home maintenance is available at [www.consumerbuild.org.nz](http://www.consumerbuild.org.nz) – a website jointly owned by the Consumers' Institute and the Department of Building and Housing. The website also has useful information about house buying, building and renovating.