

Paying Your Do's

SUMMER'S ALL ABOUT
PROTECTING YOUR HOME
THE REST OF THE YEAR

In New England, where I'm from, it's said that there are three seasons: winter, mud season and—the last season is a catch-all that crams together all of the to-do items that you thought about while your cabin fever was raging. As the temperature increases and the sun climbs to its summer position, it's time to take care of those chores that built up over the snow and mud seasons.

For owners of wood homes of any kind, now is the time to clean the debris out of the gutters, move all of the firewood back away from the house and clean up the yard. Most of this activity is intended to discourage insects and other critters that are also coming out of their winter quarters from looking at your home as a desirable vacation spot.

In some areas where we live, wildfires can be a very serious threat, and now is the best time to prepare. Many organizations offer advice on fire-protective chores, but did you ever think there was an overlap with their effect on home durability? Here are a couple of checklist items that are typically found in publications available from state and local organizations, insurance companies, the U.S. Forest Service and the ICC International Wildland-Urban Interface Code (IWUIC):

- Clear your roof and gutters of pine needles, leaves and other debris. The overlap: Cleared gutters remove rain runoff from the roof away from the house rather than allowing it to flow over the side, splashing back up onto the walls and door sills.

- Check your chimney or stovepipe to make sure the



Theodore Tilton

spark arrester is doing its job. The overlap: While you are up there, inspect the flashing around the chimney to be sure that it is protecting the house from intrusion of rain or snow. Recaulk and seal if necessary.

- Prune trees and shrubs away from the house. Keep branches at least 15 feet from chimneys and stovepipes and do not allow any to hang over a roof. Call your utility company to request that branches be trimmed around power lines. The overlap: Keeping vegetation away from a solid wood or wood-sided home will be beneficial. The vegetation tends to hold moisture and protect critters, neither being desirable; thus, pruning vegetation back allows airflow to remove moisture, and the exposed critters will look for other spots to hide.

- Remove slash and debris from your property. The overlap: Similar to the point above, insects are attracted to wood and organic materials that are in or on the ground, holding moisture, and usually decaying.

- Stack firewood away from structures, 100 feet minimum. The overlap: When insects are dormant and wood is used in a stove or fireplace, storing firewood close to the house is an acceptable temporary option. As a seasonal chore, removing leftover wood and debris to the permanent storage is important. Some even recommend that kindling be stored separate from the woodpile.

- Install a fine screen over foundation vents and

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enclose below decks to keep out hot embers that are released by low vegetation near the structure. The overlap: The primary benefit here is that the screen doubles to stop insects.

For dry climates and rural areas where wildfire is truly a seasonal affair, the recommendations broaden to include clear access for escape-fire protection equipment, fire-resistive exterior surfaces and a reliable water supply. Protection under roof overhangs to limit the effect of convective heat buildup and the use of glazing that is capable of resisting radiant heat (e.g., tempered, reflective, low-E) are also recommended. An exception is made for log walls from the one-hour fire-resistive construction requirement in the IWUIC, but there is an overlap again when considering the exterior surface. A protected log-wall exterior is resisting the sun, wind and rain, but the finish will likewise be sacrificed to the radiant and convective heat of a fire. A log wall that has upward-facing surfaces should be milled or modified during construction so that the face sheds precipitation; this will also help to keep flying embers from sitting on the logs.

For log-home owners, the overlap of durability and fire protection continues during the annual inspection of the exterior of the home to find out what the winter sun and wind did to the finish on the wood and seal between them. Every article on log-home maintenance mentions the effect of wind, sun and rain on the log surfaces and rightly so. In the first few years, while the wood is acclimating to the environmental conditions inside and outside the home, the annual inspection may reveal more to-do list items.

The list may include recaulking stretched caulk lines, caulking up-turned checks and removing pitch from the surface of knots. In the next couple of years following acclimation, maintenance may consist only of replacing a previously applied caulk line to ensure that the exterior surface still provides the first line of defense against the weather.

Is there an overlap with fire protection measures here, too? The climate and landscape can be major factors in both fire protection and log-home maintenance. For example, if a home is built in an area of high humidity, it is likely that the logs will acclimate quickly without much checking or movement. However, if the house is enclosed by vegetation such that normal breezes do not flow around the walls, an inspection for mildew needs to be done. The overlap: Clear your property so that the tree line is outside of a 30-foot perimeter around the house with individual trees isolated within the perimeter. This site element helps to protect the building in fire, but it also promotes airflow around the log walls, removing moisture.

It shall be a comfort knowing that by implementing good practices for critical reasons like fire protection, you are benefiting in several additional ways. For more information about the recommended practices for fire protection in your area, contact your state, county or local fire authorities, your insurance company and your state department of forestry. A search for "wildfire" on the Internet will provide an extensive list of reference materials that may be very useful for your area. **LHI**

Rob Pickett of Rob Pickett and Associates (www.robpickettandassoc.com), a housing consulting firm in Hartland, Vermont, is a specialist in log and timber building systems and a past president of the Log Homes Council. Rob is the business manager of TimberLogic LLC (www.timberlogic.com) and oversees thermal analysis (REScheck), construction documents and code compliance. Submit questions for this column to info@timberlogic.com.



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