



# ***Being a Responsible Homeowner***

## ***Maintenance, Repairs, Home Improvements***

# ***Being a Responsible Homeowner: Maintenance, Repairs, Home Improvements***

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Life as a homeowner can be very rewarding. You can choose the color you want your house, do some remodeling or anything else to personalize your new asset. One thing many homeowners fail to realize is that they also are responsible for any home improvements and maintenance their house may need in the future. This section includes getting to know your new home, understanding basic maintenance and when it is time to call in a professional. For more information on how to do specific projects such as fixing a leaky faucet or how to make your home child safe refer to the Maintaining Your Home module.

## **Knowing where the valves and controls are for your home**

One of the first things new homeowners should do before moving in is get to know the new home. It is recommended that you do this during your final walk through. Ask the previous homeowner where all the valves, controls and switches are to things such as electricity, water and gas, both inside and outside the home. If you do not have an opportunity to do this before closing, then as soon as you get your keys take some time to walk through the house with your family so everyone is familiar with these controls.

It is important for all family members to know where the controls are and how to turn them on and off. One never knows when a pipe may break or a faucet may leak. Your family should know what to do if they smell gas or a water pipe breaks. If they know where the controls are and

how to operate them, they will be able to properly react in an emergency.

Also consider what actions may need to be taken when you and your family are out of town. You want someone you trust to know where your control valves are and how to turn them off. This individual could check your house and in an emergency would know what to do when you are away. Although, these situations are not common, knowing how to react if and when they happen can save a lot of money in repair costs.

## **Connecting Home Utilities**

Know who to call to connect your home utilities. Individuals that live outside the city limits may have to contact private companies to service their septic systems, water and other utilities. To find out what types of utilities are offered by the county, contact the county office directly. People who live inside the city limits can call their city government for answers to their questions. Look in the telephone book under the City Government section or call operator information to get the telephone number. The yellow pages also can provide general information such as local bus routes, area maps and other helpful information.

## **Emergency Numbers**

Along with gathering information on who to call to connect your utilities, put together a list of emergency numbers using the Emergency Contact

List Work Sheet. Take time to print a copy and put it where all family members can have access to it, such as on the refrigerator door. Be sure to add additional contact numbers as needed.

## **Maintenance, Repairs, Home Improvements**

As a new homeowner you are responsible for the maintenance of your home. This can be separated into three main components: seasonal maintenance, repairs and home improvements.

Each of these is important in the upkeep of your house. Seasonal maintenance or preventative maintenance can be defined as basic home maintenance that should be done on a yearly basis. Consider putting together a maintenance chart to keep track of when to do basic, year-round jobs. Things like inspecting the roof, siding, foundation, walls and the cooling system are good to have on your maintenance chart. Use the Home Maintenance Checklist Work Sheet to help you keep track of these items. Keep in mind that this checklist reflects basic things common to houses in the southwest. If you live in another area of the U.S., there are probably other maintenance items to add to the list.

Home repairs are different from home maintenance. This type of work occurs when something actually breaks or stops working. Examples are leaky faucets, broken water pipes or water heaters, a cooling system not blowing cold air, or something as simple as a burnt out light bulb. With any home repair, regardless of how simple it may seem, refer to a how-to-guide before you begin any work. For information on specific jobs refer to the Maintaining Your Home module of the curriculum.

As a homeowner you may consider doing some home repairs, which can save money on costly labor. You also have the convenience of having it fixed on your schedule rather than waiting for someone to come to your house. Doing simple

home repairs will help you develop the confidence and basic skills necessary before you tackle larger jobs. Also, larger jobs sometimes can be avoided if repairs are done beforehand.

Evaporative coolers are an excellent example of how a small job can become big. It is common for these cooling systems to start leaking small amounts of water. Many times this is because a small hose has given out. If the problem is addressed immediately, replacing the damaged part may cost as little as a dollar. But if the leak is not fixed right away and goes on for a long period of time, this little trickle of water can cause major roof damage. The repair required by the damage can range from replacing a few shingles to replacing the whole roof. Damage like this is expensive and could be avoided by replacing an inexpensive hose.

Doing your own repairs is not always a good thing. If you take on a job that is too big, this may cause a bigger problem. Or even worse, it could cause a safety hazard in your home for your family. You also may have spent a lot of time trying to fix something and when you are done the item still does not work. When to call in a professional is different for everyone because each person has his or her own level of expertise. If you have never been up on the roof and worked on your evaporative cooler, it may not be a good idea to just go up and work on it. You may consider hiring a professional or calling a friend or neighbor to help you out the first few times until you feel comfortable doing it yourself.

The last category of home maintenance is home improvements. Home improvements can be defined as any work you want to do to your house to increase the value of your home or your quality of living, such as upgrading a kitchen or bathroom. Home improvements also can increase the marketability of your house. Usually people hire professionals to handle these jobs and the cost can be substantial depending on the home improvement.

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*This resource is one in a series on **Being a Responsible Homeowner** which include:*

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**Getting to Know Your New Home**

Maintenance Repairs, Home Improvements  
Universal Design for Easy Living  
When and How to Hire a Professional

**Financial Issues for Responsible Homeowner**

Financial Responsibilities  
Predatory Lending

**Managing Financial Difficulties**

**Foreclosure**

**Legal Responsibilities**

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