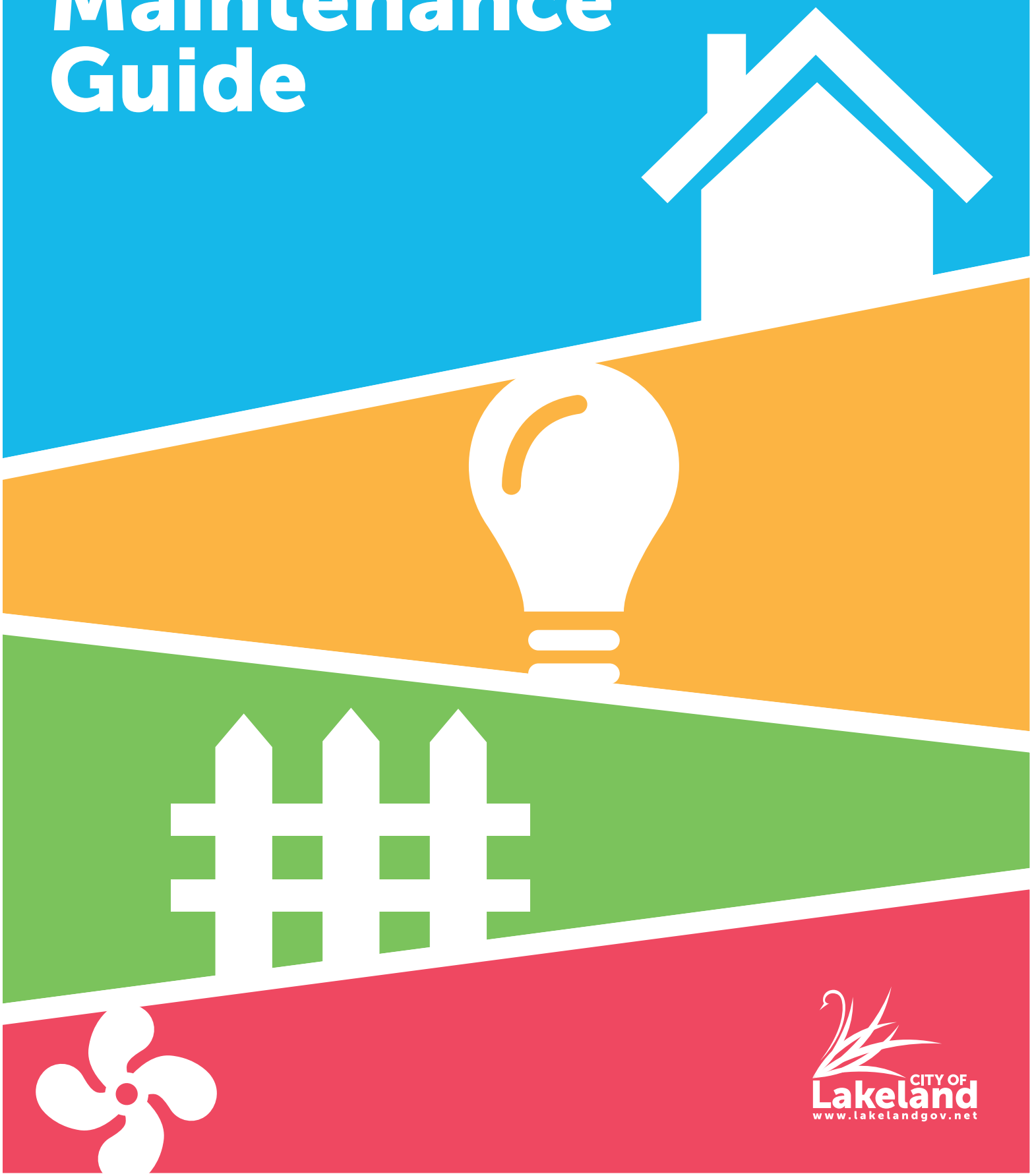
Home Maintenance Guide



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Contents

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Important Phone Numbers

For Emergencies , Call 911

My Address		
My Phone		
Insurance Company		
My Emergency Contact		
Local Hurricane Shelter		
Hospitals		
Gas Company		
Insurance Provider		
Cable Provider		
Internet Provider		
Telephone Company		
Sheriff's Office	**For Emergencies Call 911**	**Non-Emergency Number: (863) 298-6200**
Fire Department	**For Emergencies Call 911**	**Non-Emergency Number: (863) 834-8200**
Local Police	**For Emergencies Call 911**	**Non-Emergency Number: (863) 834-6900**
Electric Company	**(863) 834-9535**	
Water Department	**(863) 834-8714**	
Sewer Department	**(863) 834-8316**	
Local Municipality	**(863) 834-6000**	
Solid Waste	**(863) 834-8773**	

Emergency Valve Locations

Take a few minutes to locate the shutoff valves for utilities and write down the locations so someone else can find them if necessary. Make note of any special conditions about the location and how it works. Review the warranty and instructions for all your appliances and place the information in one safe location so you can find it when you need it.

Electrical Main Switch Location

Water Main Valve Location

Hot Water Heater Shutoff Valve Location

Gas Main Valve Location

Warranty and Instructions Location

Introduction

Your home is your most important financial investment and proper maintenance will help you protect this valuable asset. Since you are the owner, it is your responsibility to take good care of your home. You can take charge of maintaining your home by regularly doing:

- **Routine Inspections**
- **Preventive Maintenance**

A house is made up of a lot of different systems that are all connected and depend on the other systems. For example, if you have a leak in your roof, it can not only damage your roof, but can cause you to have problems with your ceilings, walls, and your electrical system as well. So, it's very important that you fix a problem when you detect it.

This Home Maintenance Guide will provide you with important information about the different systems of your house. Each section will give you important items to look for as you conduct your routine inspections.

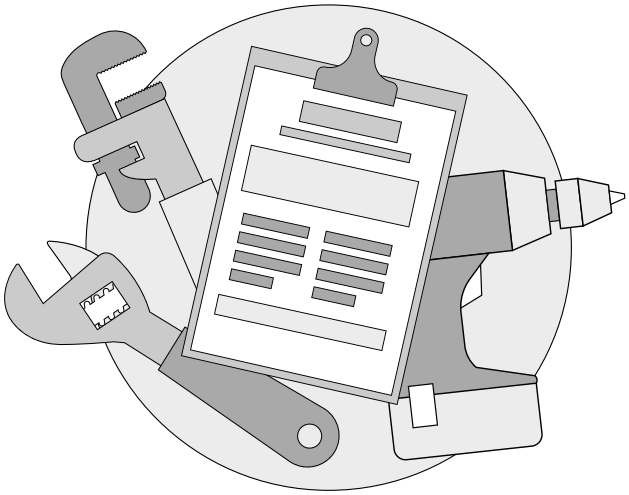
On page 4, there is a place to record the important names and phone numbers of departments, companies and home maintenance professionals that you need to keep on hand for maintenance and emergencies.

Then, we'll look at all the major systems of your house. In each section we'll discuss what you need to look out for in your routine inspections and how you can take preventive measures to maintain your house.

The next section is a schedule for a month-by-month inspection of your house with a space for additional notes. If you follow the monthly inspection and maintenance schedule, it will help keep your house in top notch condition.

Remember, problems with your house will not simply go away. They will only get worse. It is NEVER cheaper to wait to fix something.

The final section is important information from Code Enforcement and the Health Department.



Who Should Do the Work?

In most cases, normal routine inspection and maintenance will eliminate the need for a costly professional. By addressing a problem or potential problem early on, you may be able to make some of the repairs yourself. The longer a problem goes unattended, the more costly and more involved it will be to solve. Most of the home maintenance tips presented here can be done by you or someone that is handy with repairs. Structural problems require a professional to make the necessary repairs.

When using a professional, be sure they are licensed by the State of Florida for the work to be completed. Ask for a fixed price before they start the work. You should also ask for references from the home repair professional and check the references.

- **You can check their license at myfloridalicense.com**

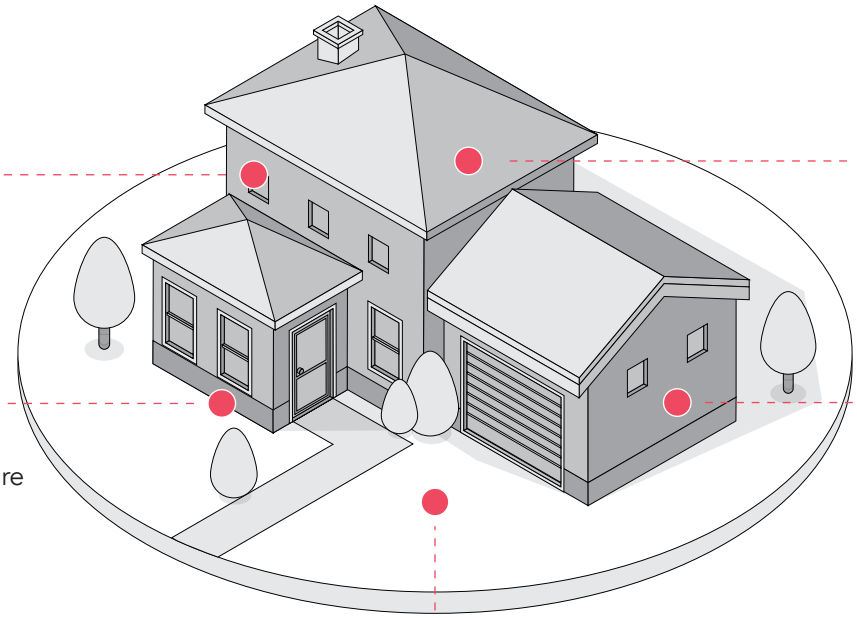
Make sure you have a written contract when working with a contractor. Once they begin the work, and any changes are needed, make sure you know the cost of the changes and have the contract amended.

Home Exteriors

The exterior of your house is made up of five major areas:

Windows and Doors
Windows and doors are openings in the siding and walls of your house.

Foundation
The foundation of your house supports the structure that is above it and keeps the structure from shifting.



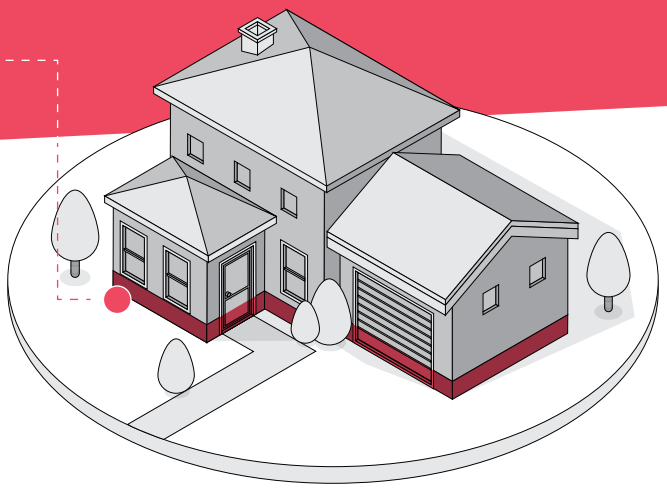
Roof
The roof covers the top of the house.

Siding
The siding of the house is the outside walls. This can include vinyl, concrete board, or stucco among others.

Yard
The yard is the area surrounding your house, generally known as your property.

Each of these areas make up the exterior of the house. The exterior of your house is your first line of protection against the elements for the rest of your home. It is important to keep it well maintained.

Foundation



The foundation is the part of your house that supports your entire structure; the floor, the walls, the roof and everything inside your home.
A well-constructed and properly maintained foundation will last for your lifetime and then some. If a foundation is properly built and well maintained, you should have very few problems if any.

The foundation of every house should be inspected at least one time a year in the spring.

As your house ages and settles, your foundation can crack. Severe weather conditions such as hurricanes or long rainy periods can also create foundation problems.

Generally, foundations are built on footers/ piers with a crawl space or a concrete slab on grade. If your house has a basement or crawl space, then your house will have a visible foundation wall.

Foundation Inspection

The first time you inspect your foundation, you should make notes as to your findings and the date the inspection was conducted. You will then be able to check any changes that may occur over the next few years based on your notes.

Landscaping, Drainage and Water Runoff

To begin your inspection you need to look at the landscaping and drainage around the foundation. You may need to have someone re-grade the ground so that water will run off away from your house. You should also make sure that any gutters and downspouts will be diverted away from the foundation at least three feet. Raised planters and similar landscaping right up against the walls will hold moisture against the foundation potentially causing damage. When leaks occur in the foundation, they are generally from improper drainage. This will also be an easy way for termites to enter your home. Trees and shrubs with large root systems too close to the walls can damage the foundation.

Cracks, Leaks and Condensation

Small hairline cracks are common and nothing to worry about. However, cracks that are wider than 1/8-1/4 of an inch, about the width of two quarters, are in need of repair. Wider cracks should be inspected by a professional building contractor or engineer to determine the cause of the cracking.

Insects

Insects are a potential problem to consider when examining your foundation. Termites and ants can hide in your house and create problems before you ever know they are there. They generally like dark and damp places that are difficult for the naked eye to detect. You should have a professional exterminator schedule annual termite inspections to ensure that you keep your house free of termites and other insects.

Sink Holes

Sinkholes are a common feature of Florida's landscape, however several subterranean events can cause holes, depressions or subsidence of the land surface that may mimic sinkhole activity. Extensive information on sinkholes is available from the Florida Geological Survey floridadep.gov/fgs/sinkholes or by calling (850) 245-2118

Foundation Maintenance

Low-lying shrubs and ground cover, like grass or mulch, will allow the moisture to drain away from the foundation and will keep the soil around your foundation stable. Plants should not be planted next to walls of your house, flowerbeds should be planted several feet from the house. This allows for adequate drainage of the soil and limits the moisture.

Small hairline cracking can be prevented by keeping the soil around the foundation as dry as possible. If the foundation was properly built and if the ground surrounding the foundation drains properly, cracking should be minimal.

Another important element is the ventilation of foundations. If you have a crawl space or basement, this area should be properly ventilated to prevent condensation and the build-up of moisture between the ground and the sub-flooring. Condensation occurs when the cool foundation and sub flooring is met by warmer air. Proper ventilation and insulation can eliminate condensation problems.

The treatment and prevention of termites is not a do-it-yourself task. It takes a complete understanding and knowledge of how and where the insects live. You should hire a properly trained and licensed professional exterminator to get rid of the insects. The best way to keep insects out of your house is to hire an exterminator to spray and treat for bugs on a regular schedule. Once you start having foundation problems from termites, it is difficult and costly to correct them.

These measures are simple maintenance steps that can save you from expensive foundation repairs.

Exterior Walls

The exterior walls and siding of your house should be weather-tight to prevent water damage. Peeling paint, open seams in siding and trim, and stucco cracks are not only unsightly, they invite serious problems. Proper maintenance of your exterior walls will help you avoid costly damage.

Exterior Wall Inspections

No matter what type of siding, finish, or trim you may have on your exterior walls you need to inspect the walls at least once a year. Your primary concern will be detecting areas where water may get through your walls. Inspect the walls from top to bottom looking carefully for defects in the surface. Pay close attention to the walls on the south and southeast sides of the house. These walls get more exposure to sun and to variations in temperature which make them more prone to deteriorate quickly. Keep your note pad handy so you can record the conditions and any changes in the exterior walls of your house.

Exterior Wall Routine Maintenance

As part of your inspection, you should include routine maintenance through periodic cleaning, caulking, painting or staining and any simple preventive repair jobs on an as-needed basis.

Cleaning

One of the simplest maintenance chores for your walls is to simply hose down your walls and trim to remove dirt and grime. Stucco finishes can generally be pressure washed. For brick, you may need to use a brush to scrub the small recesses. With vinyl, aluminum and wood siding you may find it necessary to scrub down the dirty surfaces with a cleaning solution. Any hardware store will have the necessary cleaning supplies. Always be sure to follow the directions and cover any shrubs and plants in your work area. While you are cleaning, look for mildew on your walls. You should clean the mildew with a biocide product specifically made to kill mildew. Remember to protect your skin and eyes from any cleaning solution.

Caulking

Caulking and sealing open joints and seams in the exterior walls should be a priority in your routine maintenance program. Openings will allow moisture, water and insects to creep into your house. Caulking dries out over time, so don't be surprised to find yourself caulking each year. Caulking is a simple process that you can perform using a caulking gun and a putty knife.

Make sure you are using the right kind of caulk for what you are sealing. Silicone, for example will not adhere to concrete finishes. Areas that typically need caulking are listed below:

1. **Windows and door frames**
2. **Brick and siding joints**
3. **Small foundations cracks**
4. **Cracks in stucco**
5. **Trim and siding joints**
6. **Vents**
7. **Foundation and siding joints**
8. **Wood fascia**

Painting

If you keep the paint on your house in good condition, the joints and seams well caulked and the wall surfaces clean, you will greatly reduce the chances of decay and moisture getting into your house. Paint will blister and peel over time due to exposure to sun and weather. When this occurs, you risk allowing water to get into your house. There is an easy way to test the condition of your painted surfaces. Rub your hand over the paint and if it comes away with a lot of chalky residue, then the paint is nearing the end of its useful life.

The correct way to repaint a surface that is blistering and peeling is to scrape or pressure wash off all of the loose paint, clean the surface and let it dry completely. Once the surface has dried, caulk the areas that are needed, reset loose nails and paint a primer coat on all bare surfaces. If you are painting bare concrete, sometimes a block sealer or filler might be needed. Again, allow the area to dry. Finally, apply two coats of paint. Allow the first coat to dry completely before adding a second coat. By preparing the surface well, you will extend the lifespan of your paint.

If you have metal siding, you will need to follow the same process except you will use a wire brush to clean the surface of dirt and rust. Be sure to use a metal primer before applying the two coats of paint, or use a direct to metal type paint.

Painting or staining combined with caulking will keep the wood around the exterior of your house from decaying. Your local hardware store can advise you on the types of paints you need to use for the type of surface you are painting.

Brick and stucco repairs

As with any preventive maintenance, before making repairs to your exterior walls, find the source of the problem. Covering up a problem will not make the problem go away. The longer a problem exists, the more it is likely to cost you a repair.

Brick and stucco repair can require specialized tools and skills to complete, particularly larger repairs. This is something that you can do yourself, but can cause further damage if done wrong. Have a professional perform the repairs if you are not confident.

Roof and Gutters

The roof and the different parts of the roof, such as the flashing, drains, gutters and downspouts, cannot be ignored year after year. Just because you don't have visible leaks doesn't mean that you don't have problems. Many times the damage to your roof will already be done before you notice a leak inside the house. Don't expect your roof to be problem-free. Proper maintenance can significantly extend the life of your roof.

To provide the best preventive maintenance for your roof, you should inspect your roof at least twice a year. Do this once in the spring before hurricane season and then immediately after, especially if you experienced a major storm. It also makes good sense to scan your roof and gutters throughout the year to locate any buildup of debris. Almost no roof design can resist water held against it by leaves or other debris, particularly in valleys.

Roof And Gutter Inspection

Roof covering

Shingles are the most common form of roof covering; however, the type of covering will depend on the slope of the roof. You will need to inspect the shingles from the ground, on top of the roof and from the interior portion of the rafters in the attic. If you find that the shingles are curling, cracking, losing their grainy surface, peeling away from the roof, becoming shiny at the edges, and/or changing color, then the roof is showing signs of wear. It may be time to get a new roof. When you perform your inspection in the attic, you will need to look for discoloring of rafters, water marks and decaying of wood. Water leaks can be from old and decaying shingles. More often than not, leaks occur around plumbing vent pipes, chimney structures, roof vents and roof valleys.

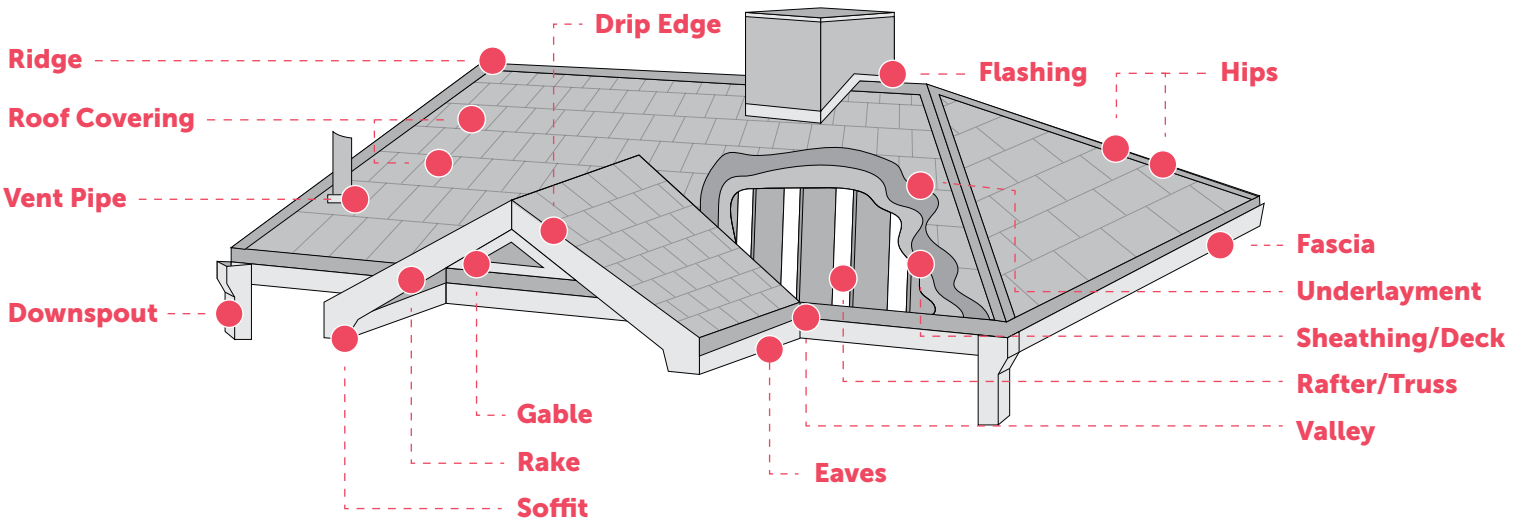
Gutters and Downspouts

One of the most overlooked preventive maintenance measures to your roof is the cleaning of gutters and downspouts. Gutters and downspouts fill up with leaves and debris. When the gutters are clogged, this gives water the chance to seep into cracks and/or back up under the roofing material. Gutters will also spill over on the ground and can cause damp foundations. If you want to limit your cleaning time, you can install plastic or wire screens over the gutters. However, the screens will also need some cleaning.

Trees

Another thing many people overlook when performing a routine inspection is the location of trees and branches around your house. Trees and branches close to the house or hanging over the house can be a hazard to your roof. During hurricanes and tropical storms, it's not uncommon for branches or trees to snap, allowing them to crash on top of your roof. Keep trees and branches at least 15 feet clear of the house.

Parts of a Roof

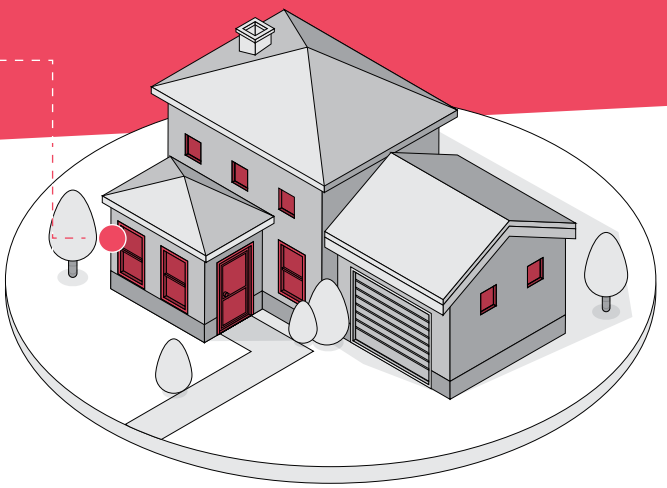


Roof And Gutter Maintenance

When inspecting your roof, safety is a primary concern. If you are going to check the roof yourself, make sure someone is with you in case of an accident. Also, if you are elderly or handicapped, do not get on top of your roof. Get a professional to inspect your roof.

If you have any signs of your roof wearing out (leaks, discoloring or peeling shingles), it may be time for a new roof. Roofs and roof repairs are very specialized, so know what you are doing or contract someone that knows what they are doing. When you see the signs of leaks, you need to get a professional to determine the problem. Addressing the problem early will limit the damage and will cost you less. Remember to keep your gutters and drains cleaned out. This is a simple and inexpensive measure that will save the life of your roof. Also, by keeping the limbs and trees trimmed away from your house you lower your risk of damage during storms.

Windows And Doors

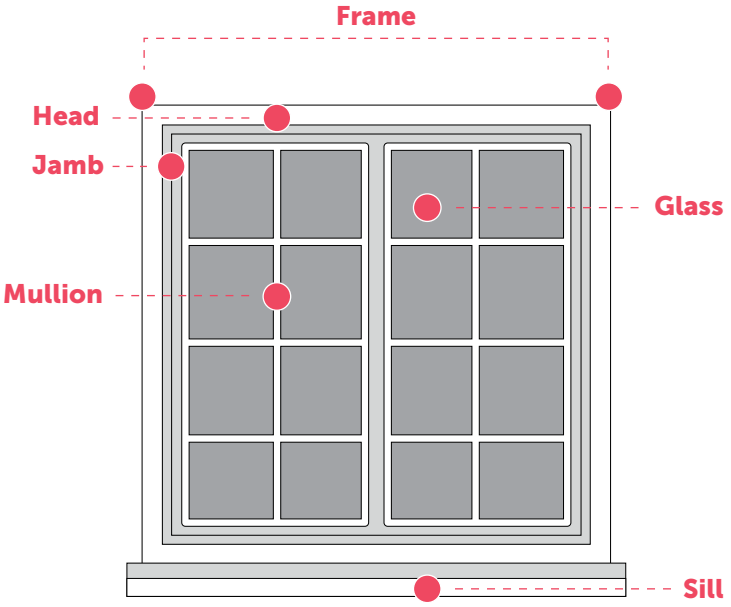


Windows and doors are an important part of any house. They provide access, lighting and ventilation into your home. Poorly installed or poorly maintained windows and doors will cause you many problems. If a window or door does not fit snugly, then it will allow hot and cold air to enter your home. Properly installed storm windows and doors will also provide additional security.

Windows and Doors Inspection

Windows are the biggest source of cooling loss. Loose-fitting, cracked or missing panes allow your air conditioning to go out the window during the summer. Caulking around the windows is very important. Caulking seals cracks and gaps around windows where frames meet exterior siding. Sealing the cracks and gaps reduces the rate of temperature loss in addition to keeping moisture out of your house.

Weather stripping is usually installed on windows where the sash and frame meet and on doors where the door and jamb meet along the sides and top. Weather stripping is generally made of rubber, plastic or foam strips. Weather stripping needs to be replaced as it gets worn, particularly in areas that are used most frequently. Once you start to see daylight through weather stripping, it's about time to replace it.



You need to inspect all of your windows every fall after hurricane season. Check the caulking and weather stripping around your windows and look for cracked, missing or loosely fitted windows.

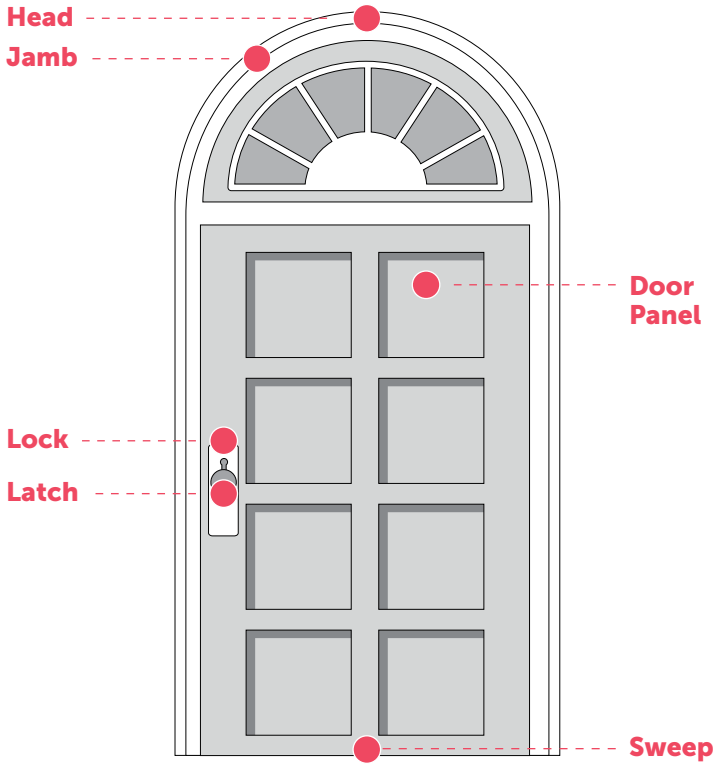
Window screens are an item that will require regular replacement. Over time the screens will become brittle and tear. Replacing a screen is something that a homeowner can do with a simple tool and minimal effort.

Doors not only provide you access into and out of your house, but they also provide you with protection from the outside. First, you need to check your door for operation. Does the door open easily, does the door close completely and will the door lock securely? Then, you need to make sure that the door is not cracked or missing any panes, if it has glass. If you do not know how to make these repairs, get a contractor to make these improvements. As with your windows, caulking and weather stripping are also very important. Doors that are used most frequently will need to be caulked and weather stripped more often.

Windows And Doors Maintenance

Inspect your windows and doors once a year, in the spring. You will need to look for and make the following repairs:

1. **Repair cracked, loose or broken glass**
2. **Scrape and paint any peeling paint on all doors and windows**
3. **Replace or repair missing, loose or deteriorated caulking**
4. **Repair, tighten or replace any loose or missing storm windows**
5. **Patch or replace the screenings on the windows**



Yards

There are a number of reasons you will want to keep your yard clean. First and foremost, by keeping the debris and trash picked up around your house, you keep insects, rats and rodents from nesting and making new homes.

Keeping the Yard Mowed

You will want to keep the grass cut in your yard. During the summer months yard maintenance is more demanding. You generally should not cut more then 1/3 of the grass length at a time to keep the grass healthy.

Plants and Shrubs

Planting plants and shrubs will help stabilize the soil around the foundation. When planting, be sure to allow some distance between the foundation and your plants. Aim to plant trees at least half the width of their full grown size from your house's foundation. (A shrub that will grow to 10" wide should be at least 5" from the foundation) Remember that too much moisture next to the foundation can damage your foundation.

Keeping bushes near your house trimmed has another benefit. Trimmed bushes and shrubs ensure that a burglar has no hiding places. If a burglar has to stand out in the open to pry on a door or window with no place to hide, they will most likely pick a less exposed target.

Trees and Limbs

Survey your yard for dead limbs and trees. It may require a professional tree surgeon to remove the debris. However, you shouldn't have any problem moving the limbs to the proper place for disposal. Check with your city or county to see who is responsible for disposal of tree and limb debris. You will also need to survey your live trees. You can do this yourself or hire a tree trimming company to do this. Trees that are too close to the house or trees that hang over power lines are dangerous, particularly during tropical storms. By trimming and removing dead limbs you will save yourself from a lot of problems.

Storage

Keep your yard free from debris. If you have odds and ends in your yard, keep them in a covered shed in the back of your house.

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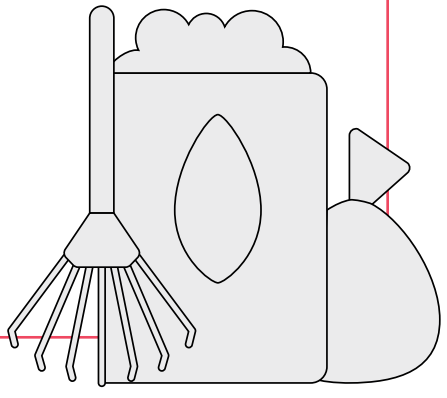
Waste Pickup Services

Bulk Junk and Yard Waste Collection

Customers are provided four (4) free yard waste and four (4) free bulk junk collections, up to 20 cubic yards each, per calendar year. To arrange for bulk waste collection, call **863.834.8773** or email **SolidWasteManagement@lakelandgov.net.** Please provide you address and type of material you have for collection.

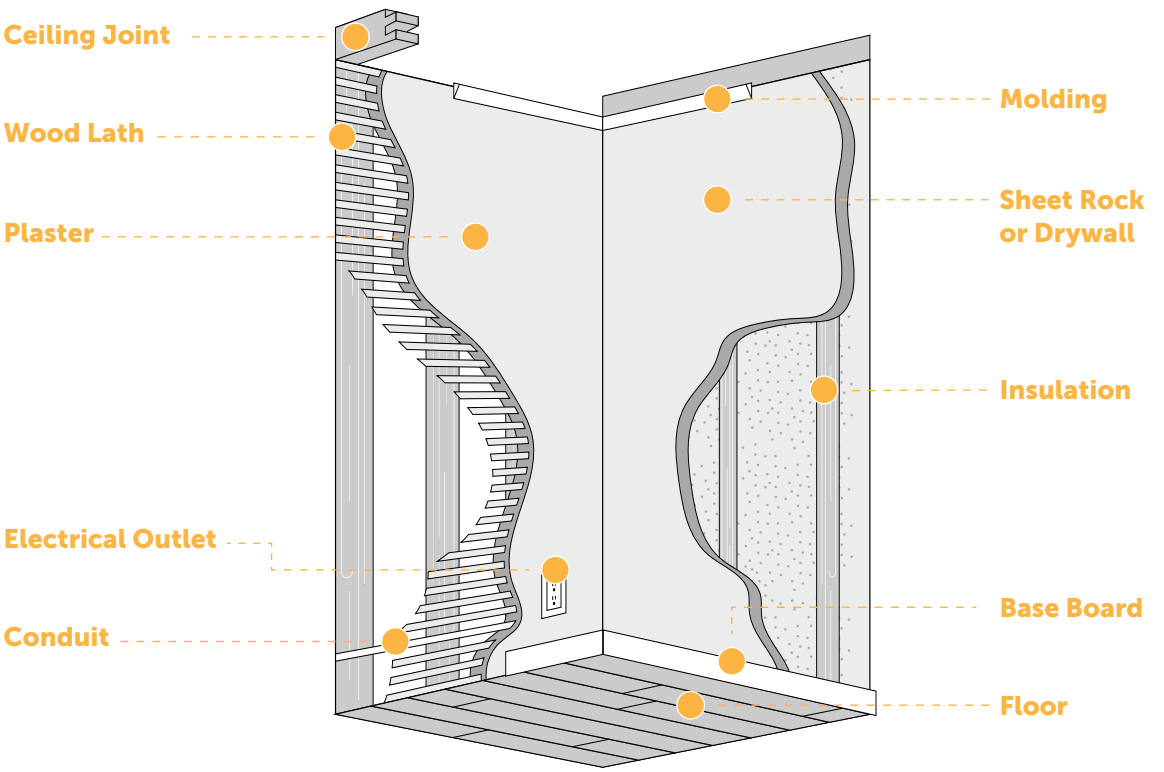


Home Interiors

The interior walls, ceilings and floors of your house form a surface that covers the structural frame, plumbing, electrical system, AC ducts and other building components that could be unsightly or hazardous.

It is important to examine the interior of your house. Quite often the first indication that you have an issue with other house elements will be discoloration on the interior walls.

Older Wall



Modern Wall

Interior Inspections

Since the walls, ceilings and floors cover the areas you are inspecting, you will need to engage all your senses to locate potential problems. As with other elements, you also have to spot changes over time. Inspection of the interior of your house should be an ongoing process. As you clean your house, look for changes in the level of the floor, cracks in your walls, damp spots on your walls, floors and ceilings. When you think you have found an area that may have changed, take the extra time to explore the problem. You want to catch a problem early before more extensive damage is done to your house. The following items may indicate warning signs that you should examine closely.

Sagging Ceilings and Walls

When inspecting your ceiling and walls, first make sure your room is well lit. Sagging ceilings may be a sign of loose drywall and should be inspected more closely. Bowed walls may indicate a weakness in the structural framework. Minor localized sagging, discoloration or softening of walls or ceilings may indicate a water leak above or behind the area. Water travels along the framework of your house and will settle in the lowest point. A leak in one area of the house may show up in an area that is far from the actual leak.

Cracks in Walls and Ceilings

Cracks come in many sizes, shapes and forms. All cracks need to be looked at to determine the cause. Very fine, straight cracks that are parallel to the walls and ceilings generally are of no great concern. They can be repaired with a flexible caulking or Spackle and touched up with paint.

Look closely at joints where two pieces of wallboard come together. Normally these joints are covered with paper tape and layers of joint compound. If you find a crack at a joint, only cosmetic repairs are necessary. You will need to watch the area over time to see if it occurs again and increases in size over the next couple of inspections.

Cracks may change size from season to season as your home expands and contracts with the weather. If the cracks grow wider over the span of a couple of inspections, you should call a professional to inspect your foundation. Cracks at angles, jagged cracks and open cracks need to be looked at far more closely. If the cracks occur over a short period of time, make the effort to look for the potential source. Poor drainage outside your home or standing water underneath it, may be causing the soil to heave and shift the building. Cracks that show up after a hurricane or severe tropical storm should be evaluated immediately by a professional.

Cracks in Floors

Cracks that appear in concrete slab floors or in rigid floor coverings, such as ceramic tile, should be closely analyzed. Trace the cracks to the outside wall where the face of the foundation is exposed. Here you can see if the crack runs up the wall or even through the foundation itself. Hairline cracks are common in any concrete structure in Florida. However, if the crack is wider than 1/8-1/4 inch, about the width of two quarters, it should be further inspected and addressed.

Floor Squeaks and Buckling Floors

Wood floors are rarely, if ever, squeak free. Since green, unseasoned wood is used in new construction, squeaks can occur later when the wood dries out and contracts. Squeaks are annoying, but rarely a sign of structural problems. Floors will buckle when they are exposed to high humidity or if they are not properly installed. Wood needs adequate expansion areas. When this is not provided at the edges, the floor will buckle to get the necessary space.

Insect Damage

Inspection for insect damage needs to be an ongoing effort. The best way to address insect damage is to prevent insect damage in the first place. A professional inspection service can inspect your home and periodically spray for insects. Generally by the time insect presence is noticed inside the house, they have already become widespread through the structure. You should look closely at exposed wood baseboards, trim, door and window jambs throughout your home. Small tan or dark brown pellets or a sawdust-like material indicates the potential presence of wood destroying organisms, such as termites. Again, the best way to prevent insect damage is to have your house professionally serviced on an annual basis.

Sight and Smell Senses

As you inspect your home, pay close attention to what your nose and eyes are telling you. A musty, damp, stale odor should be tracked at once. Check for leaky pipes or condensation on AC vents. Shower over spray that is continually splashed onto the floor can leak through cracks and cause the floor or subflooring to rot. Check the walls behind furniture and pictures that are not frequently moved. Look for mold and mildew. This is a sign of moisture or poor ventilation. If your carpet smells the padding may be absorbing moisture. If possible, pull back your carpet to inspect the padding and floor for rust spots or fungal growth. If the carpeting falls apart when you pull at it,you have a serious moisture problem. Use your eyes to survey for water leaks in your ceilings, walls and floors, particularly around baseboards. A water stain typically appears as a dark ring of discoloration around an affected area. As mentioned earlier, water will move along the framework of a house to the lowest point.

When a ceiling stain occurs below an attic, check for leaks in the attic plumbing and use a strong flashlight to inspect the roof frame.

Be sure and check the caulking around windows and doors. As caulking ages, it will crack and separate, allowing water to seep through into the interior of your house.

Interior Maintenance Tips

When you see changes in your walls, ceilings and floors, you should take the time to give them some immediate attention. Here are some interior maintenance tips that will help eliminate some major and costly repairs in the future. Use common sense when spotting changes in your house. The most important maintenance tip is to keep a clean house, free from trash and debris.

Ceilings

Ceilings that are newly installed generally need very little attention. However, if you see cracks and water stains they need to be looked into immediately. Most cracks are hairline cracks and do not represent a serious problem, especially with newly installed material. These types of cracks can be easily patched and painted. Remember, every crack needs to be investigated to see if it represents a more serious problem.

Walls

Most wall damage is caused by simple physical abuse. You can prevent a problem by paying special attention to the care of your walls. Walls need to be periodically cleaned by a nonabrasive household cleaning product. You should find out the type of paint used on your walls and make sure that your cleaning solution is suitable for the surface. If you choose to re-paint your walls, then you should be sure to use a type of paint that is suitable for your walls and existing finishes.

Structural problems with walls are indications of a more serious problem within the interior walls or the foundation of the house. When a problem is discovered, it is important to determine the cause. This may require a professional inspector or contractor to look into the problem.

Floors

Floors should be maintained by regular cleaning and vacuuming. Regular cleaning can extend the life of your floor. It will also make your inspections easier.

Odors and Mildew

You can do a lot to control mildew and musty odors. The easiest is to check the AC. It may need to be professionally cleaned: this is something you should consider doing once a year. Closets may become musty due to poor air circulation. Louvered doors increase circulation and will help keep your closets smelling fresher. Place your furniture several inches away from the wall to allow ventilation.

Stairways

Stairways are part of the house where easily preventable accidents can frequently occur. Make sure that handrails are securely attached to the walls and extend the length of the stairs. Each step should be solid/secure and the same depth and distance apart. Keep debris cleared off the stairs to prevent tripping.

Bathrooms and Kitchens

Bathrooms and kitchens need extra attention because of the constant presence of moisture. Use a strong flashlight to check the plumbing under the sinks. Check behind refrigerators to make sure that water is not running out of your refrigerator and rotting your floor. A sponginess or discoloration of the floor covering around the toilet could mean a leak in the seal where it connects to the drain flange. Look for damaged or missing caulking between the tub, sinks, toilets and the walls and floors. Joints between bathroom walls and sinks, bathtubs or showers require caulking to keep them watertight. It can not be over emphasized that caulking is a simple and inexpensive method of moisture proofing that can save you hundreds of dollars in future repairs.

Running a vent fan for 20 minutes after a shower can help minimize bathroom mold and mildew. Make sure the fan stays clear of dust so it maintains its maximum airflow.

The kitchen cooking areas need inspection about once a month. Check your range ventilator hood for grease build up and keep it clean. This will reduce the risk of fire due to grease build up. Light bulbs covered with grease should be cleaned or replaced.

Smoke Alarms

Each house should have at least one smoke alarm. If you have more than one level to your house, you should have one smoke alarm for each level. Ideally you should locate a smoke alarm in each bedroom and in the hallway outside each bedroom. Smoke alarms operate on batteries or on hard wired electricity. If you use batteries, then you will need to change your batteries twice a year. Smoke alarms are essential to the safety of your home.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

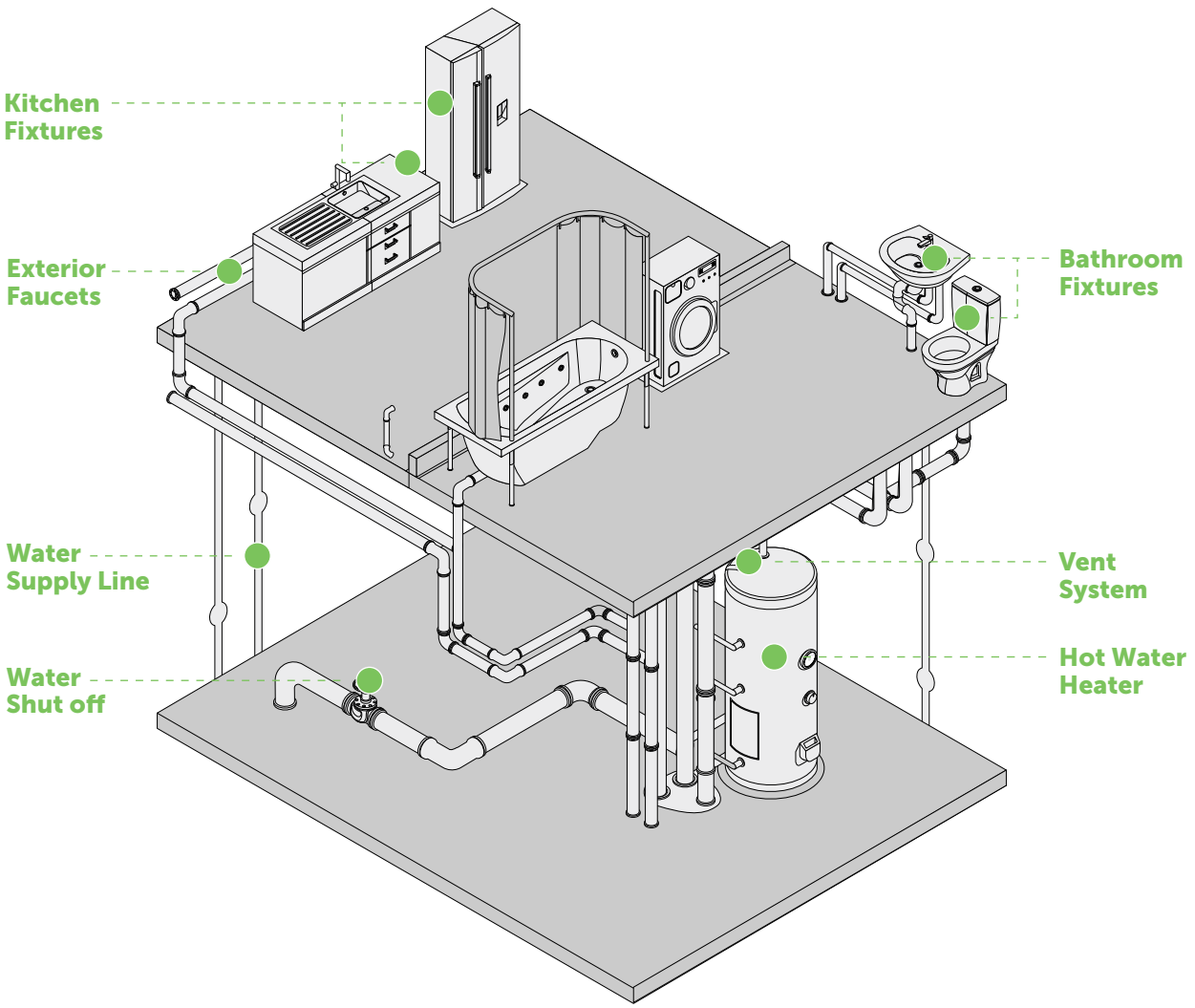
Any house that has an attached garage or any gas (natural or propane) burning appliances should have a carbon monoxide detector outside each bedroom. Place one outside each bedroom and one just inside the garage door. If your detector uses batteries you will need to change your batteries twice a year.

For more info on smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, go to the section on Home Security and Safety on page 32.

Plumbing

Plumbing in your house is largely ignored until you have problems. If you have just had your house built or rehabilitated, any plumbing problems should have been resolved. When you start having small problems, this is a clue that your plumbing system needs some maintenance. Before you can inspect your plumbing, you need to have a good understanding of the system.

The plumbing in your house is made up of three different systems: a water supply system, a drain-waste system and a vent system. All three systems depend on your water source and the capacity of your water source.



Water Supply System

If you are on a public water system, then you pay a monthly water bill to the utility company responsible for providing you with water. Your responsibility begins at the water meter. The utility company will bring the water to your property, then you are responsible for the water getting into your house.

If you are on a public water system, the water should enter your house at 20 to 80 psi (pounds per square inch). If your water pressure is low, you need to check with the utility company to see if it has adequately sized lines with the right amount of pressure to serve your home. If you live in an older home, the water line leading into the house may be undersized or corroded from age. If this is the case, you may need to replace the line leading into your house.

Some homes may use a well to provide water. Underground water is pumped into a pressure tank. As your house demands water, the water is pumped into the house and the pressure tank is refilled. If you use a well, then periodically you will need to have your well professionally inspected.

If you have problems with your water supply, hire a professional to inspect and maintain your water lines. Take note of your water bill; If your water bill is suddenly higher, you could have a leak in the ground. Also, if your water bill gradually increases, you could have a small leak in the house.

When you have problems with delivery of water to your house, call your utility company and ask them to inspect the lines. Keep in mind that you are responsible for maintaining the water line on your property.

The Water Supply Piping

Most water supply lines are made of galvanized iron, copper, brass or plastic pipe. Older homes may use lead pipes or may have used lead joints to connect the pipes. If you live in an older home, you may want to have your water tested for high levels of lead.

If your house contains galvanized iron piping, there is a good chance that your lines have some decay on the inside of the water line. That can be one of the reasons for problems with water pressure and water delivery. Galvanized pipes have a life expectancy of about 30-40 years. If you are experiencing difficulty in water delivery, you will want to have a professional look at your water lines.

Plastic polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes can last a very long time since rust or decay will not build up. If PVC is exposed to the sun, it will need to be covered or painted to prevent cracking. You will want a professional to inspect and install your PVC pipes.

Water Shutoff Valves

When water pipes break or leak, the damage to your home can be very costly. If you know how to shut off your water supply, you can prevent further damage to your house. There are several fixtures that have their own shutoff valve such as toilets, sinks, water heaters and washer connections. These shutoff valves are generally located behind or beneath the fixture. In any case, you can always shut off the water at the meter and this will shut off all water leading into the house.

You should take the time to familiarize yourself with the exact location of the shutoff valves for your house. You need to check to see if a tool is needed to assist you in shutting off the water. Inspect your shutoff valves to make sure they are fully opened. Then record the exact location of your shutoff valves in the spaces provided in the front of this guide.

Drain Waste System

Used water and waste are carried to public sewage lines or to your septic tank system. One of the most frequent problems with your plumbing system is stopped or slowly draining fixtures and appliances. The best way to prevent problems with your drainage system is to limit the debris you put in your drain. While the packing for wet wipes often states that they are flushable, they should be disposed of in the garbage. Wet wipes typically do not break down like toilet paper does, which can cause blockages and other potentially expensive problems in homes and at the wastewater treatment plants. Each drain

should be sealed off by a trap. The trap prevents toxic gases from coming back into your house. If you have a sour or sewer gas smell in your house, try pouring some water down the drain. This will cause the trap to drain the liquid and create a seal between the drain and your sewer system. If the odor continues, then you will want to have a professional look at your drains.

Vent System

Venting is necessary to maintain equal pressure in your plumbing system and to make sure that any sewer gases escape to the outside of your house. All plumbing fixtures must be vented to the outside. Some vents will lead to the roof and other vents will run to the side of the house. A newer house may have one main vent that connects to all the fixtures. It's important to keep the vents clear of debris. Small animals and birds can build nests in vents. A wire covering is always an easy way to prevent this. If you ever find a toilet bubbling when you flush it, you likely have a clogged vent. Vents should be checked twice a year to make sure that they do not become clogged.

Plumbing Inspections

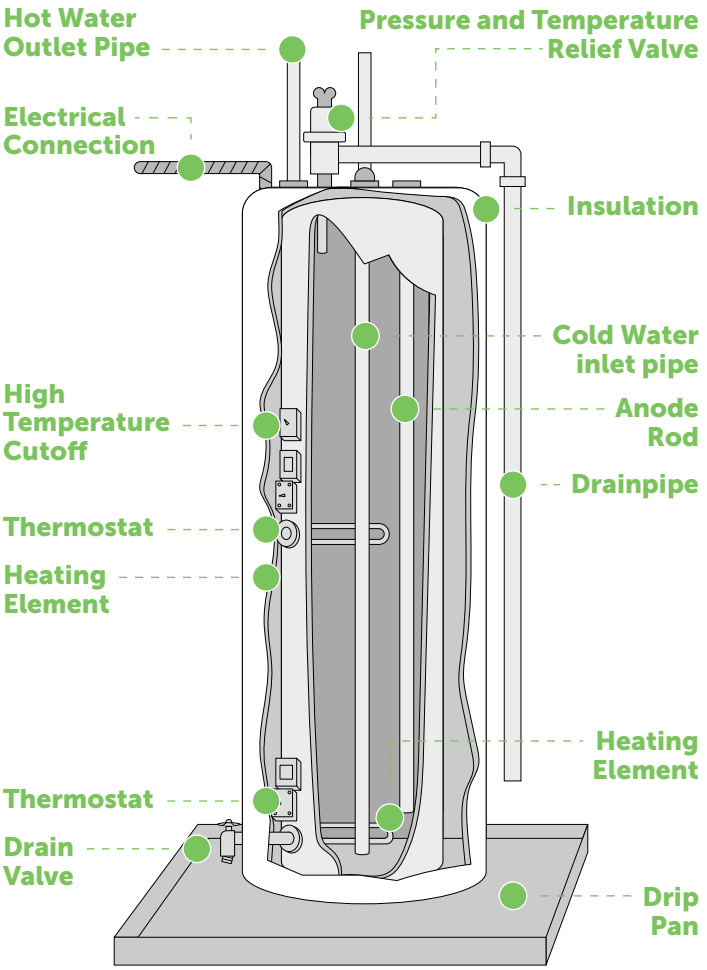
Many elements of your plumbing can be inspected by you, the homeowner. **Do not confuse the plumbing pipes with gas lines.** If you do not feel comfortable inspecting your plumbing, call a licensed plumber.

The Water Supply Pipes

First, locate your water shutoff valve. This is usually located outside the house. Know where your water meter is and how to shut off the water pipes at the main water line. Next, notice the type of water lines installed in your house. Make sure that the water lines are supported by floor joists or wall studs. Pipes running under the floor joists should be connected to the joists by pipe straps. Depending on the type of pipe, you should have pipe straps every 3 or 5 feet. If your pipes are underneath the concrete slab, you will not be able to inspect them. This is where it becomes particularly important to keep an eye on your water bill.

Obviously, as you inspect your house you will need to look for any type of leaks. Do not confuse sweating pipes with leaks. If you have a wet pipe, wipe the pipe off with a towel. If the pipe is leaking, it will start dripping immediately. If a pipe is wet from condensation, it will take time to get wet again.

While looking at your water pipes, make a note of any pipes that have been patched or repaired previously. Patched pipes should be checked annually for leaks or replaced with new pipes.



The Water Heater

You will need to inspect your water heater on a regular basis. To inspect the water heater you should start at the hot and cold water lines attached to the tank. Check for corrosion or leak at the pipe joints.

Locate the shutoff valve on the cold water line leading into the tank. Next, check the pressure and temperature relief valves to make sure they match the

tank specifications, usually found on the side of the water tank. You should not try and operate these valves as they will release hot water from the tank. Carefully inspect the outer metal jacket for rust or signs of leakage. A leaking water heater almost always has to be replaced. Use a towel to make sure it is a leak and not condensation that has wet the outside of the tank. Make sure your water heater is located in a drip pan. In case of a leak in the water heater, the drip pan can limit the damage done to your house. Your water heater should be vented to the outside of your house.

If you have a gas water heater, you should inspect the combustion vent pipe. Ensure it is properly mounted to the top of the tank and is not obstructed.

Drains and Sewage Pipes

Locate the drainage pipes in your house. Drains and sewage pipes should have a gradual slope to allow the water to run down the pipe and not get backed up. Carefully check for leaks under water fixtures such as toilets, sinks and washing machines. All leaks should be repaired immediately.

Use a strong flashlight to check all the drains under the sinks. Test a sink drain for leaks by running water into the sink and watching as the sink drains. As the water drains from the sink, listen for a gurgling sound. This will indicate that the drain is not properly vented.

There are some items that you should NEVER allow to go down your drains or your toilet:

- Baby wipes. Even the wipes labeled "flushable" will not break down like toilet paper and will clog your drains
- Cooking grease and oil. Cooking grease is not water soluble and will coat your drains, eventually leading to a clog

If you have a slow drain, this indicates your drain lines need cleaning. If you have a slow drain or a clogged drain, you may be able to fix this problem yourself. You can use liquid drain cleaner, a plunger or a plumber's snake on the clogged fixture. If you use a chemical cleaner to clean your drain, read the instructions very carefully. Chemical cleaners will burn your skin and can cause permanent injury. Remember, you can always call a professional to clean your drains.

The Vent System

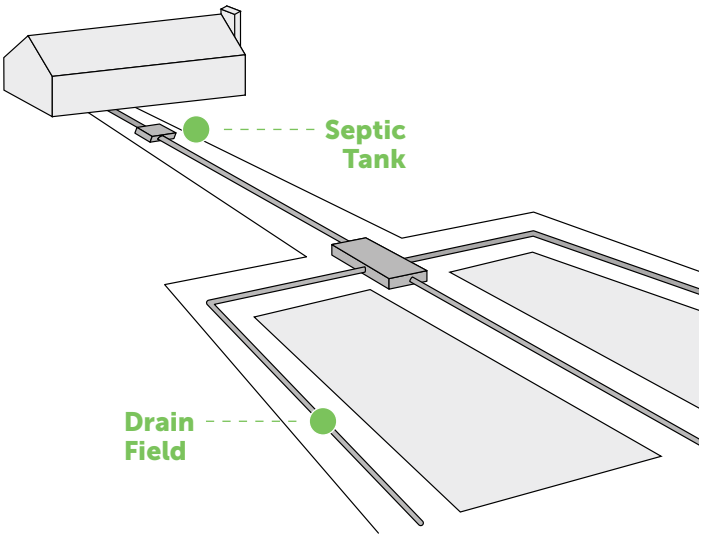
Inspecting for vents begins outside your house. You should have vents protruding through the roof or along the walls of your house. Vents should be capped to prevent clogging from outside debris . A simple wire screen will keep small animals and birds from nesting in your vent.

Continue your inspection of the vents on the inside of the house. When visible, make sure that vents are properly connected so that the air will vent to the outside. Do not allow vents to stop in your attic, basement, or crawl spaces. Vents must end outside of your house. This is very important since sewers create vapors than can be deadly. The same is true with a gas furnace or gas hot water heater. Make sure that they vent all the way to the outside.

Sewer Systems

Your home should be connected to either the public sewer system or to a septic tank in your yard. If you are on public sewer, you are responsible for getting the sewer lines from your house to the main sewer. At that point the utility company is responsible for transporting the sewage. If sewer lines become clogged, sewage can back up into your house. When this happens, you have a very serious health and safety problem. Again, get a licensed plumber to correct the problem.

If you have a septic tank, you need to know its location. Locate the septic tank and the drain fields. The size of



the septic tank and the drain field lines depend on the intended use of the septic tank and the type of soil in which the drain field is located. A septic contractor can locate and inspect your septic tank and drain field to see if they are properly sized.

If you have both a septic tank and a well, the septic tank drain field and the well should be at least 75 -100 feet apart. When sewage seeps into your well you have a very serious health and safety problem.

Periodically, you will need to have your septic tank pumped. If you smell foul odors in your yard or house and if the ground over the septic tank or fill drain field is soggy, you need to have your septic tank inspected. You must use a professional septic tank pumping service to pump out your septic tank.

Visit the Florida Health Department for detailed information of septic tanks.

http://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/ onsite-sewage/homeowners-information.html

You will find the basic Septic System Owners Guide at the end of this manual.

Plumbing Maintenance Tips

Most homeowners can perform the routine inspections and maintenance tasks necessary to keep their plumbing in good shape. When you get into more serious matters, you should call a licensed professional plumber. Here are some very basic but helpful tips that can prevent some major and costly plumbing problems.

The Vent System

Inspecting vents begins outside your house. You should have vents protruding through the roof or along the walls of your house. Vents should be capped to prevent clogging from outside debris and to keep an airtight seal between the inside and the outside. A simple wire screen will keep small animals and birds from nesting in your vent.

Shutoff Valves

Locate your shutoff valve so that you can go right to the valve in case of emergency. Once a year turn the valve completely off. Then open the valve completely and turn the valve one quarter of a turn back. This will prevent the valve from corroding and getting stuck in the open position.

Water Heaters

You should drain your water heater every year to flush out damaging mineral deposits. Follow the manufacturers directions in the owners manual carefully or call a licensed plumber. Also, inspect the pressure and temperature relief valves for overflows. Again, refer to your owners manual to see if they are operating at their designated specifications. If you have a gas water heater, a professional should check to make sure that it is vented properly.

Drains and Vents

Each month you should check the pop-up drains and strainers in your sinks. Check the hot and cold faucets to make sure that they will close completely. If you have a leak at the handle, it's probably a worn out washer that needs replacing. Remember, if you do any work on a water fixture, you should shut off the water either at the fixture or at the main water shutoff valve. Make a habit of running very hot water down your drain on a regular basis. This will help move along any debris that has gotten clogged or built up in your drain. If you smell gaseous odors in your house, pour water down the drain and then check the venting.

Water Supply

If you are a public water customer and have low water pressure or a limited water supply during the day, report the problem to the utility agency. If the utility agency can not correct the problem, you may first need to replace the line from the water meter to the house and possibly replace the water lines in your house. Check with nearby neighbors to see if they are having water pressure or water supply problems.

If you are on a well and you have discolored water, limited water supply or particles in your water system, you need to have your well inspected. Wells can dry up over time or even during dry weather periods. Also, check to make sure that your well and septic tank are properly spaced. If you have problems with discolored water, water that smells or tastes funny, you should have your water tested. Private labs, utility agencies and some County Health Departments can provide this service for a fee. Call the lab where you are going to have your water tested and ask them to instruct you about the proper procedure for collecting the sample.

Hiring a Professional

When you have plumbing problems that are beyond routine maintenance repairs, you may need to call on a professional licensed plumber. They should be licensed and should have liability insurance. You may want to ask a friend or relative to suggest someone they have used. Don't hesitate to ask for references and don't hesitate to get bids from several plumbers. Most plumbers will charge a fee for making an initial visit. If you are going to get bids from several plumbers, check with them before they make the trip to your house. To protect yourself, you should have a written agreement for the work to be performed.

Even though we recommend that you perform routine maintenance tasks, it may be necessary to call a plumber for certain items. If you are not comfortable with performing routine maintenance, then you should call a plumber. You will spend less money ensuring that your plumbing system is properly maintained rather than waiting to call someone when you have a disaster. Use common sense with your routine maintenance and with necessary repairs that occur over a period of time.

Electrical System

Electricity is an essential utility that operates the majority of our appliances, lighting, and in most cases, our heating and cooling systems. All electrical work and inspections should be performed by a Florida licensed electrician only. Working on your electrical circuitry is dangerous and can be deadly even to someone who understands how electricity works.

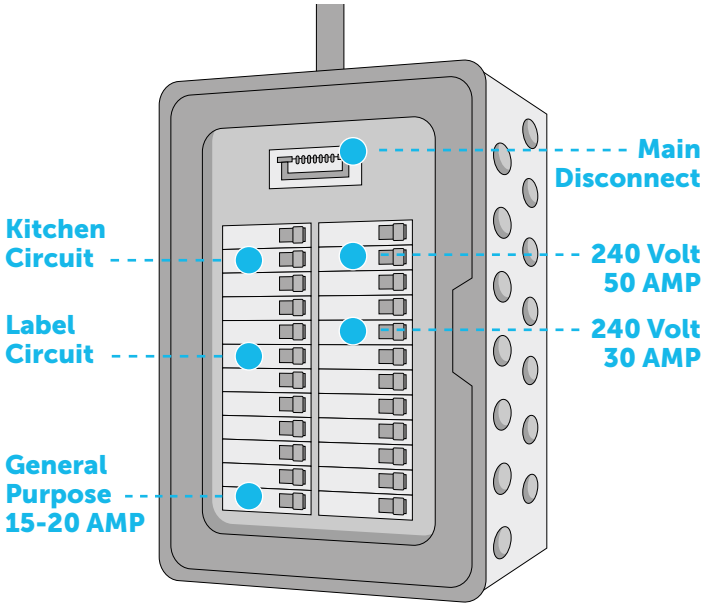
Even though it is not recommended that you work on any electrical improvements, there are some things about electricity you should understand. You need to know how and where electricity enters your house. Does your electricity enter the house through an overhead wire or an underground conduit? The electric company is responsible for providing electricity to the weather head. Once the electricity passes through the weather head, it becomes your responsibility. The electricity is tied into an electrical service panel, then distributed to the different circuits within your house.

Electrical Inspections

The inspection of your electrical system will be entirely visual. Do not insert or probe any type of tool into any electrical panel or connection.

Service Entrance

If you receive your electrical service from an overhead wire, you need to make sure that the service line is properly connected into the house. The electrical cable should be high enough that no one can reach it from the ground or from any attached steps. You will also want to make sure the cable is not in the path of any falling limbs. During hurricanes and tropical storms, it is not uncommon for a tree or some branches to fall. An electrical cable will not hold a falling tree. Instead, the cable will snap or be pulled away from the house. When this happens, you are without electricity until the electrical company can restore the line.



Electrical Service Panel

It is important that you know where your electrical service panel is located. Go to the section in this Home Maintenance Guide for important numbers and notes and write down where the electricity enters your house. Within the electrical service panel you will find breakers that protect the electrical current against short circuits. You will also see a main electrical disconnect switch that will turn off all electricity coming into the house. Once the electricity enters the service panel it is then broken down into circuits that provide electricity to specific appliances or areas of your house. Make sure that each breaker or circuit is labeled as to where it is providing electricity.

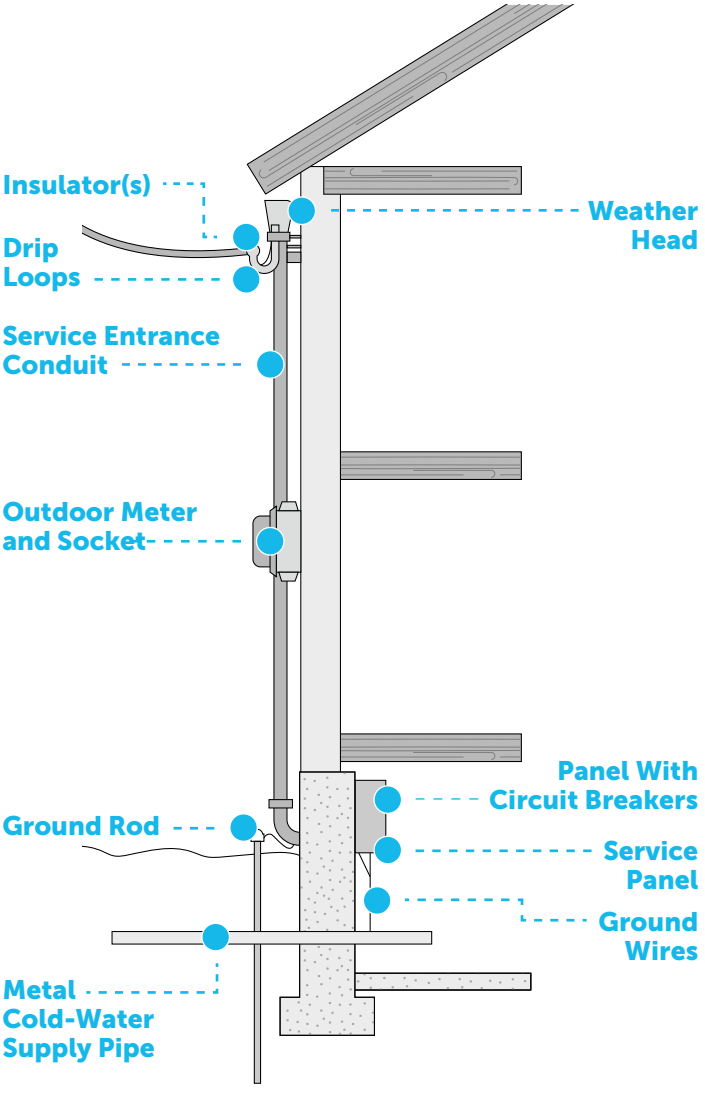
When a circuit becomes overloaded with electrical demand, the breaker will trip. When this occurs, you should first turn off the appliances and lights on that circuit. Then go to your electrical service panel and find which switch has been tripped, reset the circuit breaker to see if the electricity is restored to that particular circuit. If you flip the circuit and it immediately disconnects or flips

back you have overloaded your circuit. Try not to overload your circuits. Always use common sense when dealing with electricity. Under no circumstances should you have a bigger breaker installed on a frequently tripping circuit.

You will also want to inspect your electrical service panel to make sure it is grounded. The service panel should be grounded either into the ground with a rod or attached to a metal coldwater supply pipe. Grounding reduces the chances of shock, fire or damage to appliances and motors and helps protect your house from lightning.

Electrical Wiring

Electrical wiring should be concealed behind the wall. However, sometimes it is necessary to run electrical wiring outside of the wall. When this occurs, all wiring must be run through a conduit to protect the wiring. You should also notice that as wiring becomes old, it can crack and expose the metal inside the wire that conducts the electricity. This old, faulty wiring is a fire hazard and should be replaced. Do not attempt to replace any wiring yourself. A licensed professional electrician understands the current and circuit requirements.



Room-by-Room Inspections

As you conduct your room-by-room inspection, notice the electrical plugs. Since the 1960s, builders have been installing outlets where one slot is larger than the other. You will also notice that manufacturers are making one prong of an electrical plug larger. These polarized receptacles ensure that the electrical currents flow along the appropriate wires in the circuit.The GFCI outlet is another outlet designed to protect people from severe electric shock. It monitors the current and disconnects the circuit if it senses an imbalance in the electrical current. GFCI outlets are required in bathrooms, kitchens within six feet of a sink and outdoors. You will know if you have a GFCI outlet because there will be a red button labeled test and reset or T and R. You should test your GFCI at least once a month by pressing the test button and resetting it.

You can test every outlet in your house by using a circuit tester or a small lamp. A circuit tester can be purchased at any hardware store. A circuit tester indicates if an outlet has energy and if it is correctly wired. Again, if you have electrical problems, don't attempt to make the correction yourself. Call a licensed professional electrician to do your electrical improvements.

As you inspect each room, check the light switches and the light fixtures by turning the switches on and off to see if they operate properly. If you have any light fixtures that have hanging cords from the ceiling, check the wiring very closely. If the wiring and/or insulation around the wiring is cracked, you need to have it replaced. Extension cords can also be a fire hazard. If you have to use a lot of them, your home probably requires additional electrical outlets.

Check your ceiling fans for balance at all speeds. A greatly out of balance fan can break free from its mounting. This can cause a lot of damage to your wiring and ceiling.

Extension cords should never be secured with nails or staples, run through walls, under doors or under carpets. Also, the size of the wire of an extension cord should never be thinner than the cord of the appliance it serves. Extension cords should only ever be used where absolutely necessary.

Electrical Maintenance

Check your monthly electric bill for substantial increases. Remember, you are billed on the amount of electricity used. **The best way to reduce your electric bill is to reduce the amount of electricity used**. Simple things that will help are turning off the lights when you leave a room and turning off appliances when not in use. Also, remember that heating and cooling with electricity will substantially increase your electric bill. If you still think your electric bill is high, you can contact the electric company and have them check the meter or perform an energy audit.

There are several things that you will need to check from time to time. Before every hurricane season, you will need to check the overhead service line that connects to your house. Make sure that trees and limbs are a safe distance away from the line. If you need to prune trees around the overhead service line, contact a professional tree pruning service or, in some cases, your electric utility company will trim upon request.

Check your electrical service panel to make sure you can locate the panel. Once a year you should exercise the breakers by flipping them off and on by hand to make sure that they will trip when necessary.

Overloaded circuits are often indicated by flickering or dimming lights when appliances are turned on and by frequently tripping circuit breakers. If you frequently trip the circuit breakers, this may indicate that you do not have adequate service for your electrical demand or you are overloading that one particular circuit. Try moving appliances and lights to other outlets. Do NOT simply try and install a larger breaker. This makes the point of failure of the circuit the wires inside your walls, which will start a fire when they fail.

Heating and Air Conditioning

Air Conditioning Systems

There are two primary types of air conditioning systems used in homes today, central air-conditioning systems powered by electricity or gas and electric window units. There are several different variations of central air conditioning units and some are combined with a heating system. A licensed heating and air conditioning professional should perform the routine inspections and maintenance of the system.

Air Conditioning Inspections

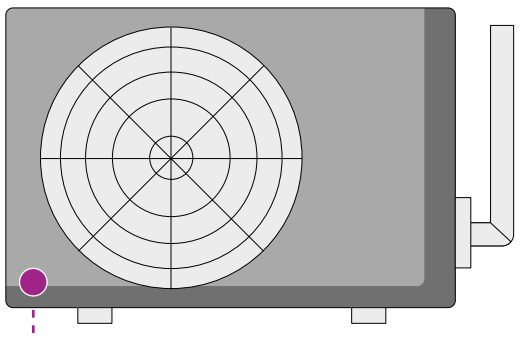
Again, you should only attempt to conduct a visual inspection. If you have problems call a professional. Your air-conditioner should be inspected annually when the outside temperature is above 60 degrees. As with your heating system, you need to know what kind of air-conditioning unit you have and what type of energy to use to operate the system.

If you have a central AC system, then you will have a central thermostat that gives you a temperature reading. As the temperature changes within your house, the air will turn on and off to keep the temperature of the air constant. The hotter the weather, the more demands that will be placed on your AC system.

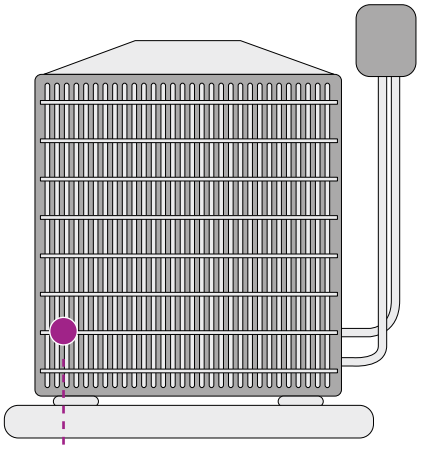
The less cold air allowed out of your house, the less air conditioning you need and the lower your bill will be. You can accomplish this with basic window and door maintenance, and by adding attic insulation. This will reduce your energy bill and save you money. For that reason, alone it's important that your house is insulated.

A window unit air conditioner should be inspected once a year when the outside temperature is above 65 degrees. Each spring you should check the unit to make sure that it is securely attached in the windows. Vines or other obstructions should not be wrapped around the outside case. Inspect the caulking around the window unit, both inside and outside the house. Make sure that any old, decaying or cracking caulking is replaced.

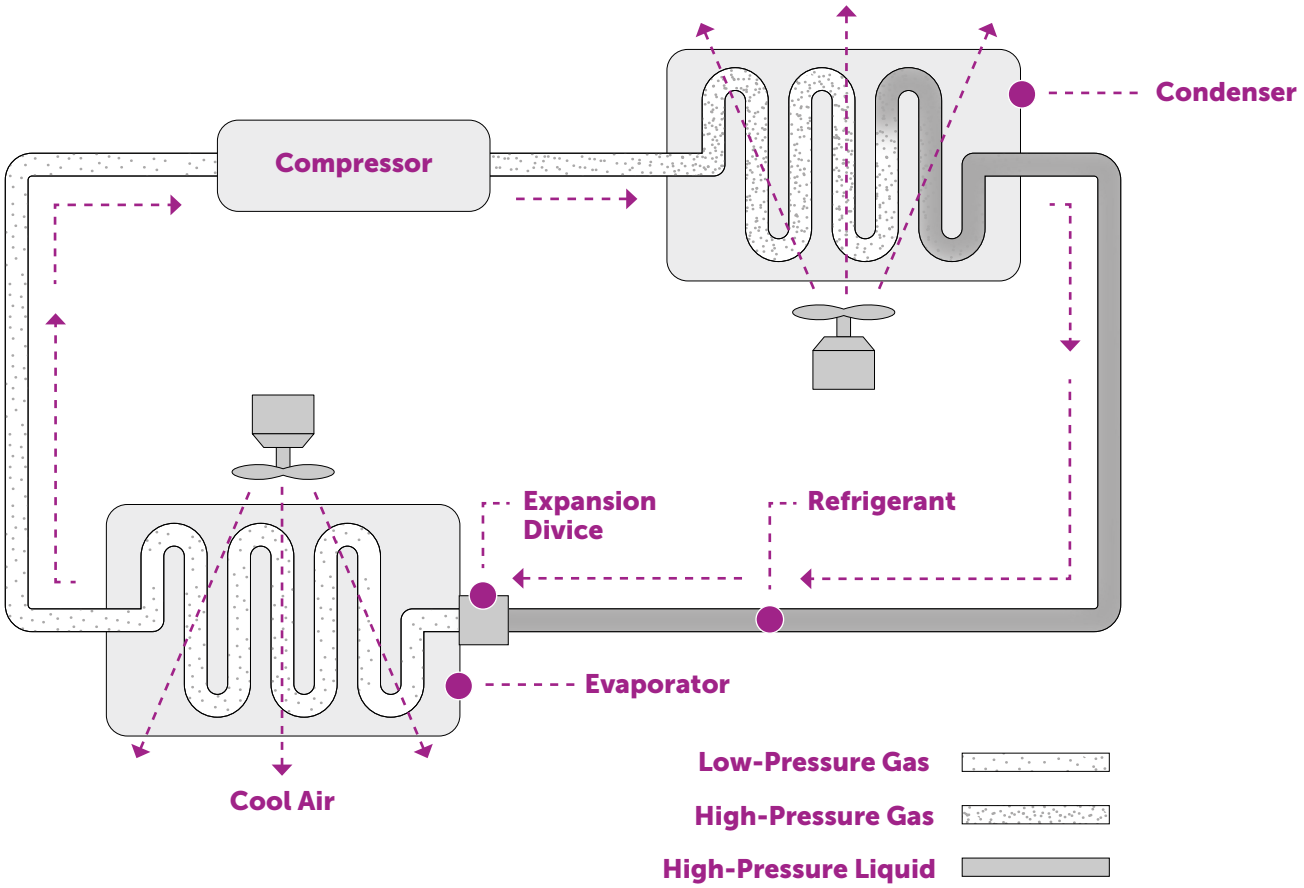
A window unit air conditioner uses electricity to cool. Read the directions and make sure that you have adequate voltage to operate your system. Most window units will have at least a three-prong plug. Never twist or cut off the round prong to force the plug to fit your electrical receptacle or circuit. An electrician can determine if you have adequate voltage to operate a window unit. An improper electrical connection may damage the unit or cause an electrical fire.



Window Unit



Central Air Conditioning


Condenser
Compressor
Expansion
Divice
Refrigerant
Evaporator
Cool Air
Low-Pressure Gas
High-Pressure Gas
High-Pressure Liquid

Air Conditioning Maintenance

You will conserve energy if you set your unit on one temperature and leave it there. Many people will cut off their central air-conditioning during the day when they are not home. This can be more costly than setting the unit at one temperature and leaving it, unless you will be gone for less than 4 hours. **Make a habit of changing or cleaning your air filters at least once a month**, it is the easiest, and most effective thing you can do. This will allow your AC to operate more efficiently, allowing your unit to function at its maximum capacity. This will also keep the air in your home cleaner. Know where the air-return vent is located and do not block the front of the vent.

All air-conditioning units will have condensation, resulting in water discharging from the air conditioner. You should have drainage to the exterior of the house. Drains can become clogged with algae or debris and should be cleaned with your routine annual inspection. If you have a window unit make sure the drainage pipe is secure. Window units can shift, causing the drainage pipe to leak inside your house.

Your heating and cooling systems are so specialized that all routine inspections, repairs and maintenance should be performed by a licensed heating and cooling expert. You can learn to recognize problems preventing more costly and time consuming repairs. An annual inspection of both your heating and air conditioning will eliminate a number of aggravating problems.

Heating Inspection

There are many different types of heating systems but each system is based on the type of energy you use. Determine what type of heating system you have and what type of energy you are using to heat your house. It could be gas-fired, electric heat or a combination of these. Determine if you have a central heating system or if your house is heated by individual units. Once you have determined the type of heating system you have, you should have a professionally licensed heating and air-conditioning company inspect your unit.

Heating Maintenance

If you smell gas, you should immediately turn off your heating system and call the gas company emergency line or dial 911. Don't try to make the repairs yourself. Today's gas fired heating systems have a safety measure installed so that if your pilot light goes out, then the gas automatically shuts off. You will know if the system isn't working because your house will not be getting warm.

If you have a baseboard or wall mounted heater, you should vacuum the heater once a month. Be sure that the unit is turned off before you start your cleaning. You should also keep objects from coming into direct contact with the heater. The newer units usually have protective screens that keep anything from touching the coils directly.

Home Security and Safety

Owning a home can be emotionally rewarding and provide financial security at the same time. However both can come crashing down in the event of a break in or fire. Here we will discuss important measures you can take to ensure the safety and security of your home.

Doors and Windows Security

When you first move into your new home, you should get new, quality locks installed by a professional locksmith.You have no way of knowing if the previous homeowner kept a key or gave one to someone else. If your exterior doors don't have deadbolts, you should have these installed too. Key-in-knob latch locks can forced by breaking the knob off. They can also be bypassed with a piece of plastic between the jamb and the door. A regular latch is only meant to hold a door closed and provide privacy, NOT security.

Sliding glass doors are important to properly secure because they have weak locks and are common targets for burglars. The lock on the door should be adjusted to engage the plate so that it cannot be disengaged with any amount of movement. You can add security to a sliding glass door with a few simple modifications. Make sure the sliding glass door cannot be lifted out. This can be prevented by installing three large flat head screws into the top of the frame. Drive the screws until the door just clears the head but opens smoothly. Having a pin lock installed in the door is also an excellent way of adding security to a sliding glass door. Finally placing a dowel stick in the door frame at the track so the door cannot be moved from the outside, this also works for sliding windows.

Casement, Louvered and Miami Jalousie windows open and close by means of a gear operated by a handle. These can be difficult to secure, however removing the crank handle from the operating mechanism can offer some protection.

Double-and single-hung sash windows that operate upward or downward usually have simple sash locks that are easily jimmied if poorly adjusted. Check your windows to ensure they are properly adjusted and lock fully and securely. The most effective protection for double and single hung windows are key locking security sash locks.

It is nearly impossible to make a house impregnable, but it is relatively easy and inexpensive to make forced entry difficult and time consuming. A burglar wants to avoid being caught, so the longer it takes to force open a door or window, the more likely a burglar is to pick a different target.

If you think your home has been entered you should call the police at once. Don't go into your home in case the intruder is still there.

Fire Prevention

Your home contains all the ingredients for a fire, FUEL (rugs, curtains, furniture, paper, grease, etc...); IGNITION SOURCES, (matches, range, appliances, heating equipment, electricity, etc...), and AIR to keep the fire going. You should make sure to keep your home safe by cleaning up any fire hazards and periodically checking for new hazards:

- Don't overload circuits or sockets
- Inspect the HVAC system annually
- Clean out your dryer vent
- Don't let electrical cords get wet
- Don't smoke around flammable liquids
- Turn pot handles so they can't be knocked off the range
- Discard oily or greasy rags
- Discard any electrical cords that are frayed or damaged
- Don't try to use water to extinguish a grease fire. Use a lid to cover the pan tightly and turn off the range.

Equip your home with fire extinguishers. There are several different classes of extinguishers that are used for different types of fires. Please contact the local fire department for information on which fire extinguishers you should have in the event of a fire. Having a working

smoke alarm could mean the difference between life and death for you and your loved ones! Having properly installed and maintained smoke alarms will provide an early warning signal so you and your family can escape, unharmed.

Each year smoke detectors should have their batteries replaced. This is unnecessary if you have 10 year sealed battery detectors. You should also vacuum out the detectors at least once a year. Dust can cause false alarms or even prevent them from working entirely.

Most fires happen at night, so smoke detectors should be placed in the following locations:

- Inside each sleeping space
- Outside of each sleeping space within 20' of the door.
- At least one on each level of the home.

You should prepare yourself and your family for a fire by discussing how to deal with a house fire. You should know how to get out of your home if one exit is blocked, know how to open all windows and doors in each room and decide on a meeting place outside the home.

CITY OF Lakeland
www.lakelandgov.net

Free Smoke Alarms
for Those in Need

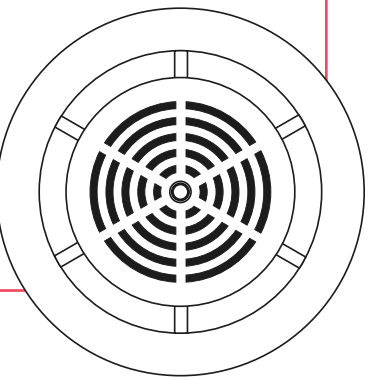
In the event of a fire, having a working smoke alarm could mean the difference between life and death for you and your loved ones! Having properly installed and maintained smoke alarms will provide an early warning signal so you and your family can escape, unharmed.

The Lakeland Fire Department offers free smoke alarms to those who cannot afford them due to financial circumstances. Smoke alarms for the hearing impaired are also available for free through this program.

For more information regarding LFD's Smoke Alarm program, please call **(863)834-8201** or visit the Administration Building located at 701 E. Main Street, Lakeland, FL 33801.

* The department does not provide carbon monoxide monitors, alarms, or detectors.

Scan for more information



Hiring a Contractor

Tips for Hiring a Contractor

Before you hire a contractor, ask to see the state-issued license. Also, verify the license number with DBPR and check for any complaints.

- An occupational license does not qualify an individual to act as a contractor
- Being registered with the Division of Corporations as an Inc. or LLC does not qualify an individual or company to act as a contractor
- Get a written estimate from several licensed contractors. Make sure the estimate includes the work the contractor will do, the materials involved, the completion date and total cost
- Beware of contractors who claim to be the fastest or the cheapest. Hiring them could result in poor workmanship, inferior materials or unfinished jobs
- Check with your local building department for any local license requirements

Contact DBPR

Customer Contact Center: 850-487-1395 Report Unlicensed Activity: 866-532-1440

Unlicensed Construction Activity Scams

While hiring an unlicensed contractor may provide a quick fix in the short term, it could result in many serious and lasting consequences, including further damage to your property. The Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) receives varying cases of alleged unlicensed construction activity including those alleging substandard work not up to building code, instances of homeowners paying for a job that is not completed as well as contractors abandoning the project.

By hiring a licensed contractor, you will have peace of mind knowing that the project will be done by someone who has taken the time to acquire the appropriate education and the proper workers' compensation and/or liability insurance and who possesses the necessary experience.

MyFloridaLicense.com

For answers to other questions or for assistance following a disaster or emergency, contact the following:

American Red Cross
1.800.HELP.NOW 1.800.435.7669

Attorney General's Price-Gouging Hotline
1.800.646.0444

Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Consumer Tips for Natural Disasters
1.800.HELP.FLA 1.800.435.7352

Department of Elder Affairs
1.800.96.ELDER 1.800.963.5337

Department of Financial Services
Insurance Claim Hotline
1-877-693-5236

Florida Emergency Information Line
24-hour Hotline (FEIL)
1.800.342.3557
(This number is only operational during an emergency event)

Construction Trades Requiring a State License

- Air-Conditioning
- Building Contractor
- Electrician
- General Contractor
- Home Inspection
- Mold-Related Services
- Plumber
- Pool/Spa
- Residential Contractor
- Roofer
- Sheet Metal
- Solar

Construction Trades Not Requiring a State License

- Cabinet Installation
- Carpentry
- Carpet Cleaning
- Cleaning Swimming Pools
- Drywall/Sheetrock
- Flooring
- Installing Above-Ground Pools
- Masonry
- Painting
- Paving
- Tree Trimming and Removal

Warning Signs a Contractor May Not Be Licensed

- Unlicensed contractors often target the uninformed and inexperienced, as well as the elderly
- No license number in advertisement or posting. By law, contractors licensed by DBPR must include their license number in all advertising
- They want all or most of the money up front and will only accept cash. They may also want you to write the check to them individually or to "cash"
- They give a post office box address instead of a street address
- They show up in unmarked vehicles offering to do work and often have out-of-state tags
- They try to convince you a permit is not necessary or that it's cheaper if you obtain it yourself

How to Report Unlicensed Activity

Unlicensed activity occurs when an individual offers to perform or performs services that require a state license and the individual does not hold the required license.

Floridians are asked to report any suspected unlicensed activity to DBPR by emailing **ULA@MyFloridaLicense.com** or calling the Unlicensed Activity Hotline at **(866) 532-1440.**

Permit Requirements

Residential Permitting Guidelines

Contractor & Home Owner Permitting:

Visit us online and download the Residential Plan Requirements form, which includes a list of all required information necessary for permitting for new homes and additions to existing homes.

All accessory buildings such as detached carports, garages, workshops & storage sheds require a building permit.

Fences

Residential fences can be a maximum of six feet (6') in height on rear and interior sides, and can be placed adjacent to or on property lines, subject to the requirements of the Land Development Code and subject to the regulations relating to visibility at intersections. Fences in front and street side yards can be a maximum of four feet (4') in height unless the fence is located outside the required front or street side setback, in which case the fence can be a maximum six feet (6') in height. Fences must also be set back at least three feet (3') from all improved alleys. No barbed wire, razor wire or electrified fence shall be allowed in any residential district.

A permit is required for all fences, including replacement of an existing fence. You can download the application online or contact Building Inspection for additional information.

Swimming Pools

All swimming pools (in-ground or aboveground), non-portable spas & hot tubs require a permit. These structures have zoning requirements allowing them to be built or placed in side or rear yards only, and are required to meet a certain distance (setback) from the side or rear property line.

Pools also have certain barrier protection requirements to help prevent drowning. Certain P.U.D. zoned areas could have a special setback requirement.

Historic Districts

Exterior renovations, additions, demolitions, and new construction in historic districts require approval of the Historic Preservation Board prior to submission of a building permit application.

No Permit Required

Building

- Painting
  (Painting of commercial buildings within the Lakeland Downtown Development Authority boundary and historic districts MUST have Design Review approval prior to painting.)
- Carpeting
- Replacing cabinets
- A permit is not required for minor (non-structural) repairs less than $750, or painting, installing new carpet or flooring.

Electrical

- Replacing existing:
- Light fixtures
- Fans
- Cover plates

Plumbing

- Stopping of leaks
- Clearing drain stoppages, provided such repairs do not involve or require the replacement/rearrangement of valves or pipes
- Replacing faucets Mechanical Replacement of any part within a single piece of equipment
- Connection of portable equipment such as Portable heating appliances Portable ventilation equipment Portable cooling unitReplacing faucets

Mechanical

- Replacement of any part within a single piece of equipment
- Connection of portable equipment such as
- Portable heating appliances
- Portable ventilation equipment
- Portable cooling unit

Permit Required

Contracted Work

Usually, any work you are contracting out to a licensed contractor requires a permit.

Call us and we can verify if the contractor is licensed and registered to do the type of work under his contract and if permits are required.

Permits are required for most of the following work:

- Building
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Mechanical
- Roof
- Gas
- Fences
- All storage buildings (sheds and other accessory structures such as carports, garages, workshops, etc.)

A permit is not required for minor (non-structural) repairs less than $750, or painting, installing new carpet or flooring.

Scan for more information

Monthly Maintenance

Checklist

Here are some routine maintenance and inspection tasks that should be conducted on your house. Make a habit of performing these tasks each month and making the necessary repairs. This will reduce the possibility of expensive repairs and maintenance in the long run.

JANUARY

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Vacuum coils on refrigerator.
- ○ ○ ○ Check for termites and other pests.
- ○ ○ ○ Vacuum out smke alarms and change the batteries.

FEBRUARY

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Make sure every electrical outlet has a protective cover.
- ○ ○ ○ Make sure extension cords aren't being walked on.
- ○ ○ ○ Make sure electrical fuse boxes, junction boxes and switches are covered.

MARCH

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Check gas connections.
- ○ ○ ○ Drain your hot water heater.

APRIL

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Inspect the foundation
- ○ ○ ○ Check the exterior walls of the house.
- ○ ○ ○ Check the locks and latches on all doors and windows.

MAY

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Check the roof for loose shingles.
- ○ ○ ○ Remove dead and fallen trees and limbs.
- ○ ○ ○ Clean out gutters and downspouts.

JUNE *Hurricane Season Starts*

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Check the roof, floors and walls for any signs of water damage or dampness.
- ○ ○ ○ Check the caulking around windows and doors.
- ○ ○ ○ Secure weather stripping around windows and doors.
- ○ ○ ○ Wash and clean interior walls.

JULY

Year 1 2 3

- ◯ ◯ ◯ Clean or replace air filters.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Inspect and repair flooring throughout entire house.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Check all stairways to make sure they are secure.

AUGUST

Year 1 2 3

- ◯ ◯ ◯ Clean or replace air filters.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Check gas connections to make sure there are no leaks.

SEPTEMBER

Year 1 2 3

- ◯ ◯ ◯ Clean or replace air filters.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Check the painted surfaces of the house.
- ◯ ◯ ◯ Test GFCI outlets.

OCTOBER

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Replace or repair any damaged glass on windows or doors.
- ○ ○ ○ Clean chimney and make any necessary repairs.

NOVEMBER *Hurricane Season Ends*

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Check insulation in the attic, if there was a hurricane.
- ○ ○ ○ Clean dead plants, leaves and garbage from around the house and yard.
- ○ ○ ○ Make necessary repairs to any damaged walls.
- ○ ○ ○ Check your roof for loose shingles.
- ○ ○ ○ Clean out the downspouts and gutters.

DECEMBER

Year 1 2 3

- ○ ○ ○ Clean or replace air filters.
- ○ ○ ○ Don't overload any single electric circuit.
- ○ ○ ○ Check all faucets, hoses and valves for leaks.
- ○ ○ ○ Check all stairways to make sure they are secure.

Maintence and Repair Contacts

Utility/Service Type

Provider | Account Number

Username | Password

Phone | Email

Utility/Service Type

Provider | Account Number

Username | Password

Phone | Email

Utility/Service Type

Provider | Account Number

Username | Password

Phone | Email

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Utility/Service Type

Provider | Account Number

Username | Password

Phone | Email

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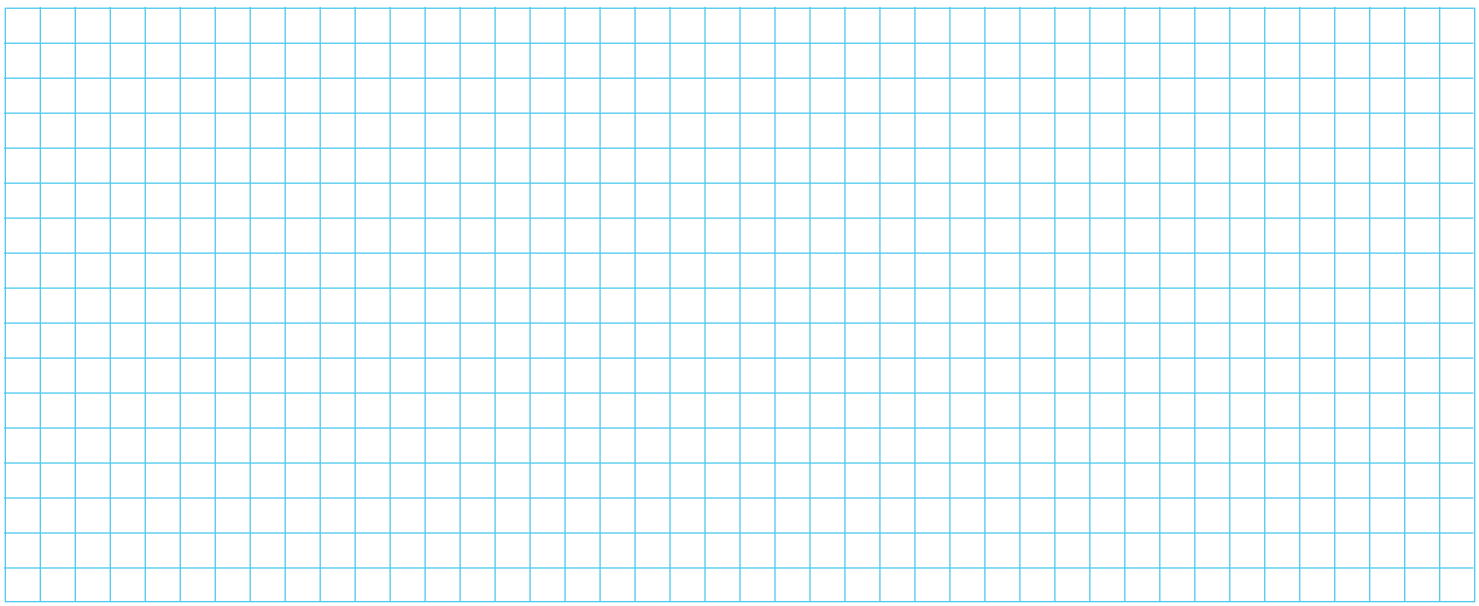

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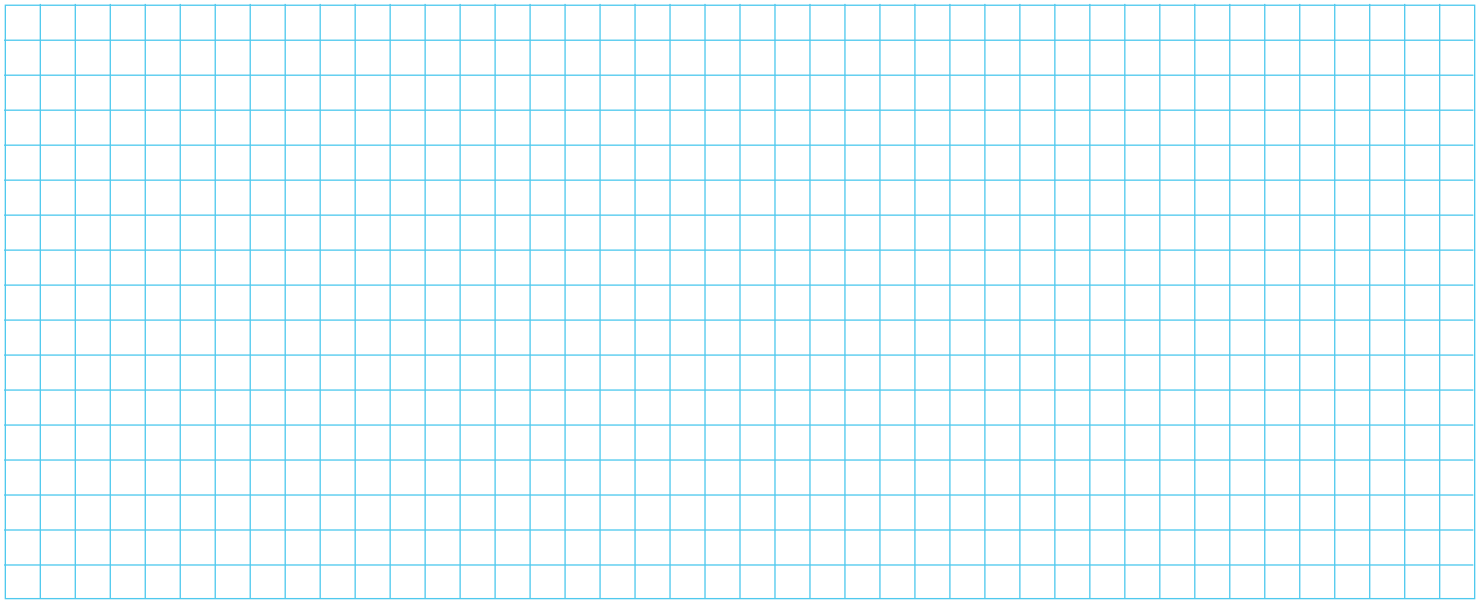


Lakeland: Up To Code

Our Mission

The City of Lakeland's mission is to be a community working together to provide an exceptional quality of life. In support of that mission this brochure was designed to inform property owners and tenants of some of the most common code violations within our city. We invite you to review this information and contact the Code Enforcement Office if there are any questions as to how these standards apply to your property. Working together responsibly we can provide an exceptional quality of life for all of Lakeland's residents.

Common Code Violations:

Fences

Fences cannot be over four feet tall in front or street side yards or 6 feet in height in side or rear yards. Fences must be constructed of approved materials be kept in good repair. Use of materials such as barbed wire, razor wire and electrified fencing are prohibited within residentially zoned areas. Six feet is the maximum height for fences in the back yard and non-street sides.

Derelict/Inoperable Vehicles

A derelict/inoperable vehicle is a vehicle that does not display a current license tag and/or is not equipped with all parts that are required to legally and safely operate on public streets and/ or can not be driven under its own power. Derelict/inoperable vehicles cannot be stored except in a fully enclosed, legally constructed building.

Open Storage

Open storage is prohibited. Generally, any equipment, materials or furnishings that would ordinarily not be used outdoors may not be stored outdoors. For example, you may not keep indoor furniture, household appliances, auto parts or building materials outside.

Minimum Housing Standards

All wood, siding, shingles, roof covering, railings, walls, ceilings, porches, doors, windows, screens and any other exterior parts of residential structures must be maintained in weather-tight, rodent proof, sound condition and in good repair. Interior walls, ceilings, floors, doors and hardware must be in sound condition and in good repair. Electrical, heating and plumbing fixtures shall be installed in accordance with local codes and maintained in good and safe repair.

Unsecured Structures

Structures which are open and unprotected as a result of the omission or disrepair of windows, doors, walls or other enclosures are required to be secured or boarded up. The City has specifications for boarding up, which is allowed until repairs are completed, not to exceed 120 days.

Yard Maintenance Standards

Yard maintenance includes any untended growth in excess of 12 inches in height and maintenance of plant material in any right-of-way abutting the property.

Junk, Trash and Debris

Junk, trash and debris are prohibited from being left in the yard and must be disposed of properly. This includes, but is not limited to, junk, auto parts, appliances, furniture, building materials, tires, trash such as discarded paper, cardboard, plastics, etc., and debris such as tree trimmings and fallen limbs.

Non-Residential Violations

All non-residential type structures shall be maintained in sound condition and good repair, be weather-tight, watertight and resistant to the harmful effects of weather. Exteriors must be free of peeling paint, graffiti, mold, broken glass, etc. Any reconstruction shall be finished in a manner that will not depreciate values of neighboring properties. Materials used in the reconstruction must be with the same or similar materials used in the existing construction.

Signs

The sign regulations deal with prohibited signs, abandoned conforming and non-conforming signs, and signs placed within public rights-of-way. Signage prohibited by the sign regulations includes, but is not limited to, banners, pennants, streamers, balloons, and fluttering devices designed to attract attention, portable signs, temporary point of purchase signs, and signs on vehicles.

Commercial Vehicles/Equipment

It is unlawful for any person to park any commercial vehicle, such as semi-trucks and/or trailers, either as one unit or separately, wreckers, tow trucks, box trucks, dump trucks, bucket trucks and the like, in any residentially zoned areas within the city. The parking or storage of construction equipment is also prohibited in residentially zoned areas except on property where the sale, rental, servicing or storage of construction equipment is a conditional use or on property where a building permit has been issued and construction is actually in progress.

Parking

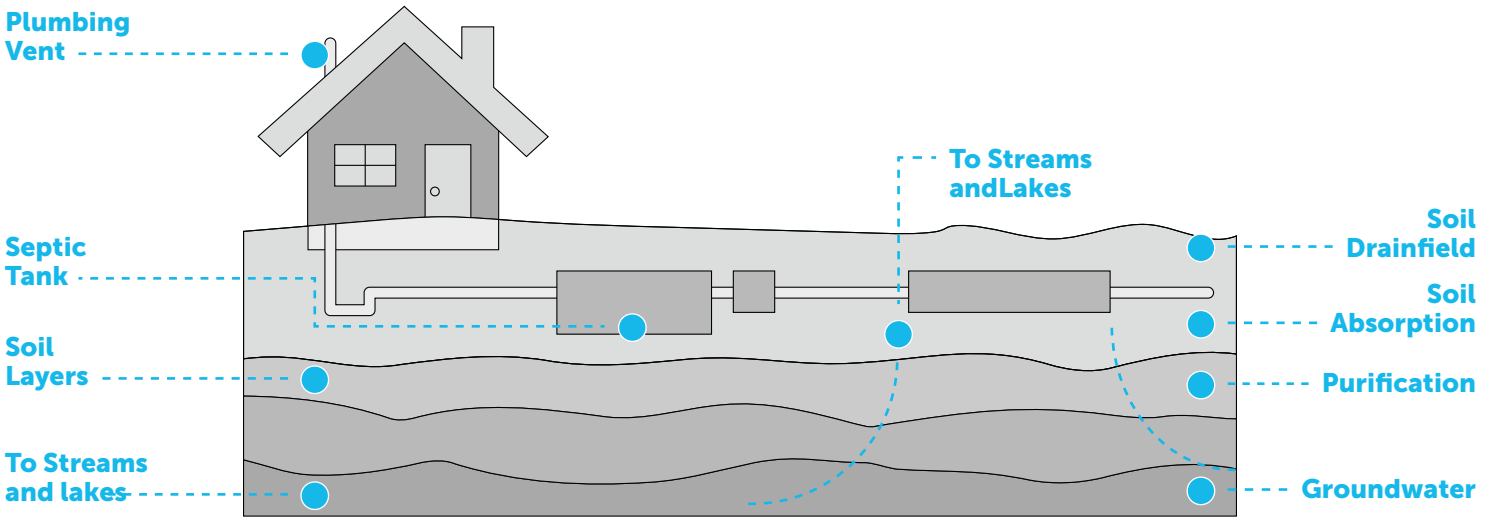
Motor homes, campers, boats, trailers, etc. may be parked upon the owner's own residential premises as long as they are within applicable setbacks and are not parked in the front yards, street side yards or public rights-of-way.

The **Code Enforcement Office** ensures compliance with the City's codes and ordinances relating to housing, overgrowth, open storage/care of premises, zoning, disabled/abandoned vehicles, minimum maintenance for commercial structures, signage, and news racks. Violators are provided time to correct most violations and administrative hearings are scheduled for those that are not corrected. Code Enforcement Officers are each responsible for different areas/districts (divided by census tracts) of the city. The Sign Enforcement Officer is responsible for obtaining compliance with the sign and news rack regulations city-wide.

Did You Know?

- Complaints of alleged code violations can be reported through the City's website at lakelandgov.net/citizens-action-center, via the City's LAKELANDGOV mobile app or by phone or email to the Code Enforcement Office. Please note, however, that effective July 1, 2021, state law requires a person who reports a potential violation to provide their name and address before an enforcement action may occur. This law further prohibits a code enforcement officer from initiating enforcement action by way of an anonymous complaint.
- The most common violations are illegal parking of inoperable vehicles and failure to mow and clean up junk and trash.
- Most construction activity, including roof replacement, window and/or exterior door replacement, structural repairs, electrical and plumbing, require a permit. For more information, please contact the Building Inspection Division at **863.834.6012** or by email to **buildinginspection@lakelandgov.net.**
- Any business located within the city limits requires City and Polk County Business Tax Receipts. Please call the Occupational License Division at **863.834.6025** for more information.
- All businesses located within Lakeland's city limits are required to obtain a business tax receipt from both the City of Lakeland and Polk County. For more information, please contact the Business Tax Office at **863.834.6025.**
- The City can clean and clear vacant lots after the required legal notification is made to the owner.
- The City can address unsafe residential buildings through demolition under the Standard Housing Code.
- Code Enforcement Officers routinely attend neighborhood association meetings to review and explain code requirements. If you would like an officer at your next meeting, please call **863.834.6251**.

Septic System Owner's Guide



If you have a septic system on your property, this guide is for you. If you are unsure, please call Water Utilities at **(863) 834-8714** for assistance.

If you are like most property owners, you might not think much about the sewage that goes down your drains. If you own a car and understand the importance of preventative maintenance (like changing your oil), you will understand how maintaining your septic system saves money and prevents headaches.

This septic system owner's guide can help you learn how to use and maintain your system properly. It also provides a place to record and keep important information, such as maintenance records.

Read this guide to learn:

- Why it is important to maintain your septic system
- How a septic system works
- How to locate your septic system
- How to take care of your septic system

Why it is important to maintain your septic system

Maintaining your septic system will save you money, help keep you and your family healthy and protect the environment.

- Having your system inspected and pumped regularly is a bargain when you consider that repairs and replacement costs can be thousands of dollars.
- Untreated sewage contains disease-causing germs and can smell bad. A failing septic system can cause sewage to back up into your house or onto your yard. It also may allow untreated sewage to seep into drinking water wells and water bodies used for drinking and recreation.
- Untreated sewage from failing septic systems may pollute shellfish beds and recreational areas, such as lakes and rivers. Quality of life, recreational opportunities and tourism may decline.

How a Septic System Works

A septic system uses natural processes to treat and dispose of sewage.

Most systems have a septic tank and drainfield. This is called a conventional system. The diagram above shows the parts of a conventional septic system.

A septic tank provides the first step of treatment. It separates and stores solids, greases and oils from sewage so the remaining liquids can go to the drainfield. Some systems need additional tanks and pumps to move this partially treated sewage to the drainfield.

The drainfield and the soil underneath it provides most of the treatment. The drainfield is under the ground, and uses approved drainfield products to spread the partially treated sewage across the bottom of the drainfield so that it can percolate down through the soil. The soil acts as a filter to remove disease-causing germs, some nitrogen and other pollutants.

Some advanced systems provide additional treatment for certain pollutants, like nitrogen. In Florida, these systems are permitted as aerobic treatment units or performance-based treatment systems. Florida has specific maintenance requirements for these systems. Contact your county health department for more information.

All systems, whether conventional or advanced, require maintenance to work properly.

How to Locate Your Septic System

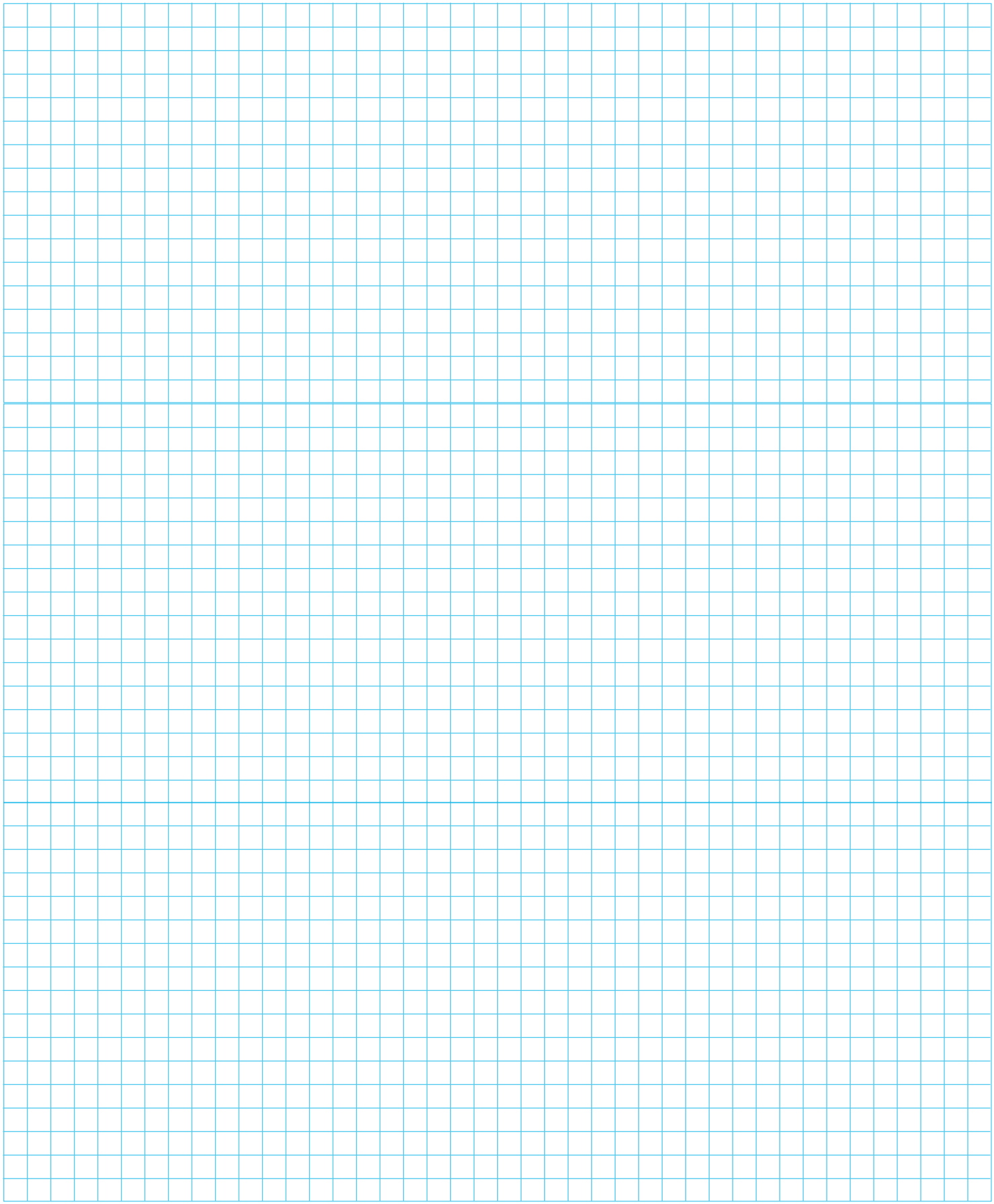
In order to take care of your system, you must know where it is. Locating your system will enable you to ensure your tank is accessible for pumping and that your drainfield is protected.

Locating your system is not always easy. If you do not already have a copy of the installation approval of your septic tank system and your permit application paperwork, contact your county health department to see if they may have copies. The site plan associated with your permit, if available, indicates the approximate location of the system and other information. Keep the paperwork in this file folder for future reference and pass it on to the next property owner. If you can't get a copy of your permit paperwork, contact a licensed septic system contractor or a licensed plumber who will be able to locate your system for you.

You can also try to locate the system yourself. To find the exact location of the tank, start by looking in your crawlspace to see the direction in which the house's sewer pipe enters the soil, or look for the cleanout of the building sewer, which is usually outside the house. Follow the building sewer pipe to the septic tank. Gently push an insulated probe into the soil to feel for the pipe or the tank. Be careful to not puncture the pipe or old plastic or fiberglass tanks. Before digging cal 811, Sunshine State One. They will ensure there are no buried cables in the area.

When you have your septic tank pumped, mark the location of the septic tank and take a photo of it. This will help you find it again.

Make a sketch on the grid provided below that shows your septic tank and drainfield in relation to your house, driveway, fences or other permanent features.



How to Take Care of Your Septic System

Caring for your septic system can help you avoid the nightmare of a failing system. If your septic system was properly located, designed and installed, you are in the driver's seat for the care of your system. By following the recommendations below, you can help your system work properly for years to come.

Inspect and Pump Regularly

- Have your septic tank inspected and pumped regularly every three to five years by a state-licensed septage disposal service. Excess solids in your septic tank or a clogged or damaged filter can cause your system to fail.
- If your system is an aerobic treatment unit or performance-based treatment system, make sure you understand the maintenance requirements in Florida for your system. Contact your county health department for more information.
- Call your county health department, registered septic tank contractor or licensed plumber whenever you experience problems with your system.

Protect Your Drainfield

- Find out where your drainfield is so you can make sure it is protected. See the previous page for tips on how to locate your drainfield.
- Plant only grass over or near the drainfield. Roots from trees and shrubs can grow into the drainfield from long distances, which can clog and damage it.
- Divert downspouts and other sources of water away from your tank and drainfield area. Too much water entering the tank and drainfield area prevents proper treatment and can cause your system to fail.
- Prevent vehicles from driving or parking over your septic tank or drainfield.
- Don't cover any part of the drainfield without a permit and don't dig around it.

Watch Your Drains

- Don't pour strong chemicals, cleansers or unwanted medications down your drains or toilets. These can kill the bacteria in the septic tank that help treat sewage. Also, do not pour cooking oil or grease down your drains, which can clog the drainfield.
- Don't use your toilet to flush anything but human waste and toilet paper. Anything else, including "flushable" wipes and kitty litter, can clog and/or possibly damage your septic system.
- Don't use a garbage disposal, or at least limit its usage. If you use a disposal, you should have your tank checked more often than normally suggested.
- Don't allow backwash from water softeners to enter your septic system. Discharge from water softeners should be re-routed at least 15 feet from the tank and drainfield.

Use Water Wisely

- Conserve water to reduce the amount of sewage that must be treated and disposed of by your system. Repair any leaking faucets or toilets promptly.
- Do laundry over several days instead of all at once to put less stress on your system. Consider the installation of a separate laundry system.

System and Maintenance Records

Use the following spaces to record information about your septic system. Some of this information can be copied from your construction permit. Your county health department may have a copy on file.

Good maintenance records can be a positive selling point for your property.

Permit Number _____ Issued To _____

Date Issued _____ Address _____

System Description _____

System Type

◯ **Conventional** (not an aerobic treatment unit (ATU) or performance-based treatment system (PBTS))

◯ **ATU***

◯ **PBTS***

*Note that Florida has specific maintenance requirements for these systems. Contact your county health department for details.

Drainfield

◯ **Trenches**

Number of Trenches _____

Trench Length _____

◯ **Bed**

Drainfield Dimensions _____

◯ **Tank(s)**

Septic Tank Size (gallons) _____

Pump Tank Size (gallons) _____

◯ **Special Features**

Drip Irrigation? (yes/no)

Low pressure distribution? (yes/no)

Inground Nitrogen-reducing Biofilter? (yes/no)

Other _____

Septic System Installer:

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Date System Installed _____

Permit Final Approval Date _____

Septic System Pumper:

Name _____

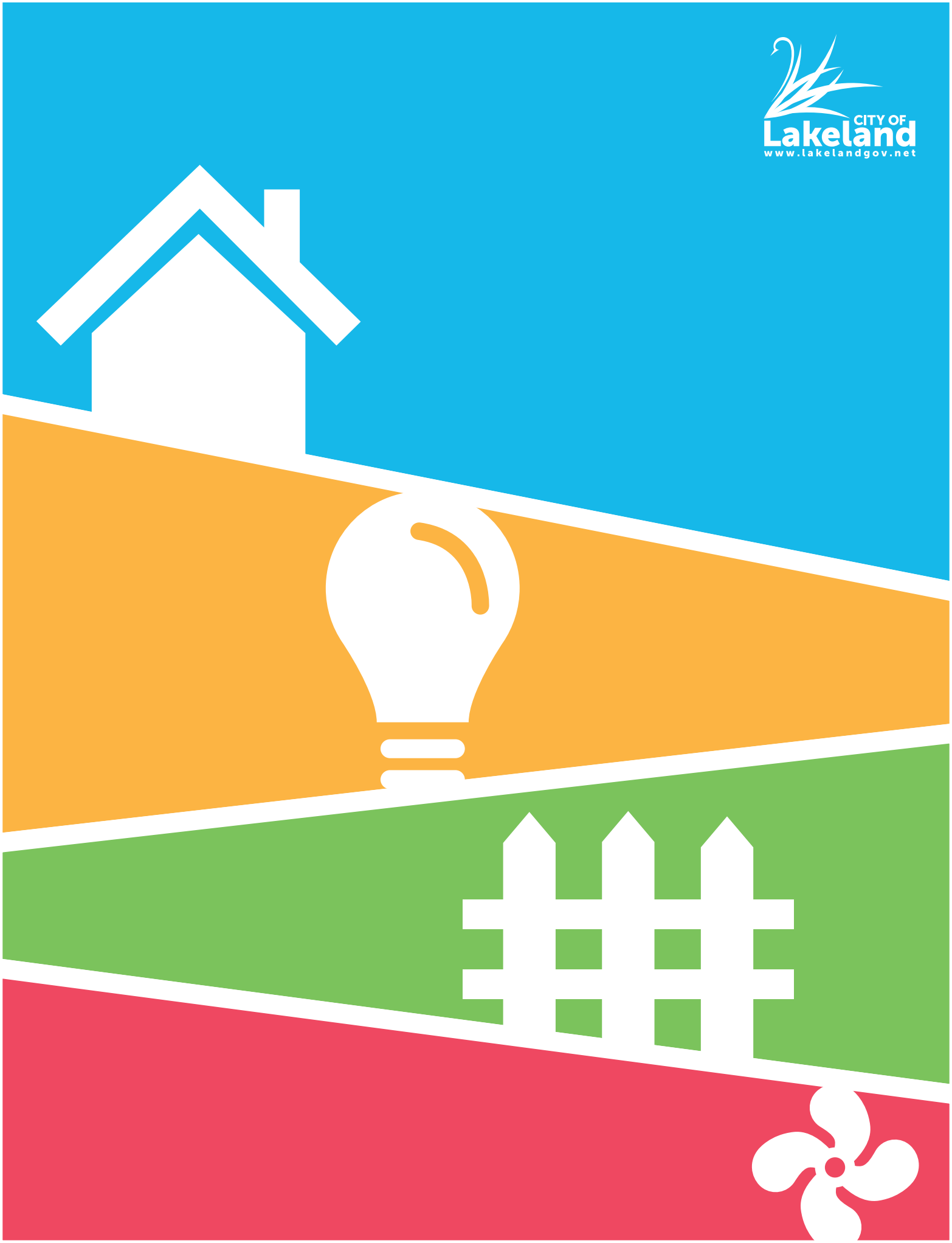
Address _____

Telephone _____

System Maintenance Record

Date	Work Description	Company	Cost

For more information, contact your county health department. To find your county health department, visit: **FLHealth.gov/all-county-locations.html**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