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BUILDERS

FREE PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

Winter-Ready Home Checklist

A complete guide to preparing your home for a Southeastern Pennsylvania winter

ADDRESS _____ DATE STARTED _____

Southeastern Pennsylvania winters bring freeze-thaw cycles, wet snow, ice storms, and long cold stretches that find every weak spot in a house. Work through this list in October and November, before the first hard freeze. Items tagged **DIY** are homeowner tasks. Items tagged **PRO** are best handled by a licensed contractor or technician.

01 GUTTERS, DOWNSPOUTS, AND DRAINAGE

Most winter damage starts with water that has nowhere to go

- ☐ **Clean gutters** – Remove leaves, seed pods, and shingle grit after most leaves have dropped — DIY
- ☐ **Flush downspouts** – Run a hose down each one and clear any clogs at elbows and underground drains — DIY
- ☐ **Check gutter pitch** – Watch for standing water or overflow at seams; re-hang sagging sections — DIY
- ☐ **Tighten hangers and seal seams** – Re-secure loose spikes or brackets and caulk leaking joints and end caps — DIY
- ☐ **Extend downspouts** – Discharge water at least 4 to 6 feet from the foundation with extensions or splash blocks — DIY
- ☐ **Check grading** – Soil and mulch should slope away from the house, about 6 inches of fall over the first 10 feet — DIY
- ☐ **Clear window wells and area drains** – Remove leaves and debris; confirm covers are secure — DIY
- ☐ **Consider gutter guards or heat cable** – Worth it on homes with heavy tree cover or a history of ice dams — PRO

02 ROOF, CHIMNEY, AND FLASHING

Inspect from the ground with binoculars unless you are comfortable on a ladder

- ☐ **Look for missing or damaged shingles** – Check for curled, cracked, or lifted tabs and bald spots missing granules — DIY
- ☐ **Inspect flashing** – Check around chimneys, vents, skylights, and wall intersections for gaps or rust — DIY
- ☐ **Check pipe boots** – Rubber vent collars crack with age and are a common leak point — DIY
- ☐ **Inspect the chimney exterior** – Look for loose or missing mortar, spalled brick, and a cracked crown — DIY
- ☐ **Confirm a chimney cap is in place** – Keeps out rain, animals, and debris — DIY
- ☐ **Trim overhanging branches** – Keep limbs at least 6 to 10 feet from the roof to limit ice and storm damage — PRO
- ☐ **Remove debris from valleys and flat sections** – Leaf piles hold moisture and cause early shingle failure — DIY
- ☐ **Schedule repairs before snow** – Shingles seal best above 40 degrees, so do not wait until December — PRO

03 ATTIC, INSULATION, AND VENTILATION

A cold, dry, well-sealed attic is the best defense against ice dams

- [ ] **Check insulation depth** – Target R-49 to R-60, roughly 14 to 18 inches of blown fiberglass or cellulose — DIY
- [ ] **Look for gaps and compressed areas** – Fill thin spots, especially at the eaves and over the top plates — DIY
- [ ] **Air-seal attic penetrations** – Seal around light fixtures, plumbing stacks, wiring holes, and the chimney chase (fire-rated material at the chimney) — PRO
- [ ] **Insulate and weatherstrip the attic hatch** – Add rigid foam to the back and gasket the opening — DIY
- [ ] **Confirm soffit vents are open** – Baffles should keep insulation from blocking airflow at the eaves — DIY
- [ ] **Check ridge and gable vents** – Clear nests and debris; confirm screens are intact — DIY
- [ ] **Verify bath and dryer fans vent outside** – Fans that dump into the attic cause frost, mold, and rot — DIY
- [ ] **Look for leaks, stains, and frost** – Dark sheathing, rusty nails, or damp insulation point to moisture problems — DIY
- [ ] **Check for pests** – Look for droppings, nesting, or chewed wiring before animals move in for winter — DIY

04 HEATING SYSTEM

Service it before you need it, not during the first cold snap

- [ ] **Schedule an annual furnace or boiler tune-up** – Includes burner, heat exchanger, flue, and safety-control checks — PRO
- [ ] **Replace the furnace filter** – Then check monthly through winter and replace every 1 to 3 months — DIY
- [ ] **Test the system early** – Run heat on a mild day and listen for unusual noises or odors — DIY
- [ ] **Service heat pumps** – Clear leaves and debris around the outdoor unit and test defrost mode — PRO
- [ ] **Bleed radiators** – Release trapped air from hot water radiators until water appears — DIY
- [ ] **Check boiler pressure and the expansion tank** – Typical residential range is about 12 to 15 psi cold — PRO
- [ ] **Clear vents and returns** – Move furniture and rugs off registers; vacuum dust from grilles — DIY
- [ ] **Fill the oil or propane tank** – Lock in delivery before demand spikes and check the tank for rust or leaks — DIY
- [ ] **Install or program a smart thermostat** – Set back 7 to 10 degrees at night and when away, never below 55 — DIY
- [ ] **Inspect exposed ductwork** – Seal leaky joints with mastic or foil tape, not cloth duct tape — DIY

05 PLUMBING AND FREEZE PROTECTION

A single burst pipe can cause more damage than everything else on this list

- [ ] **Shut off and drain exterior hose bibs** – Close the interior shutoff, open the outside spigot, and leave it open — DIY
- [ ] **Disconnect and store hoses** – A connected hose traps water and can burst even frost-free spigots — DIY
- [ ] **Install insulated faucet covers** – Cheap insurance on every exterior spigot — DIY
- [ ] **Blow out irrigation lines** – Shut off the backflow preventer and purge with compressed air — PRO
- [ ] **Insulate pipes in unheated spaces** – Crawlspaces, garages, exterior walls, and under-sink cabinets on outside walls — DIY
- [ ] **Add heat cable to vulnerable lines** – Use only UL-listed, thermostatically controlled cable — DIY
- [ ] **Seal drafts near pipes** – Close gaps at rim joists, sill plates, and pipe penetrations — DIY

- [ ] **Locate and test the main water shutoff** – Make sure it turns freely and everyone in the house knows where it is DIY
- [ ] **Flush the water heater** – Drain sediment and test the temperature and pressure relief valve DIY
- [ ] **Test the sump pump** – Pour water in the pit and confirm it starts, discharges, and shuts off DIY
- [ ] **Add a battery backup or water alarm** – Winter storms knock out power when snowmelt is highest PRO
- [ ] **Know your cold-snap routine** – Open cabinet doors on outside walls and let faucets drip below 20 degrees DIY

06 WINDOWS, DOORS, AND AIR SEALING

Air leaks can account for a quarter or more of heating costs in older homes

- [ ] **Do a draft check** – Use an incense stick or your hand on a windy day around windows, doors, and outlets DIY
- [ ] **Replace worn weatherstripping** – Check every exterior door, including the basement and garage entry DIY
- [ ] **Adjust or replace door sweeps and thresholds** – You should not see daylight under a closed door DIY
- [ ] **Recaulk exterior window and door trim** – Use a quality exterior sealant on cracked or missing joints DIY
- [ ] **Reglaze or seal older wood windows** – Repair loose glazing putty and failing sash cords; install storm windows PRO
- [ ] **Swap screens for storm panels** – Clean tracks and check that storms close and latch fully DIY
- [ ] **Lock windows** – Locking pulls the sashes tight and reduces drafts DIY
- [ ] **Install outlet and switch gaskets** – Foam gaskets behind cover plates on exterior walls DIY
- [ ] **Seal the fireplace when not in use** – Close the damper fully or install a chimney balloon or glass doors DIY
- [ ] **Add insulated window coverings** – Cellular shades or thermal drapes help on single-pane windows DIY
- [ ] **Consider a blower door test** – An energy audit pinpoints the leaks that matter most PRO

07 EXTERIOR WALLS AND FOUNDATION

Small cracks let in water that freezes, expands, and widens them

- [ ] **Walk the foundation** – Look for new cracks, efflorescence, and loose or missing mortar DIY
- [ ] **Seal hairline cracks** – Larger, stepped, or widening cracks should be evaluated by a pro PRO
- [ ] **Seal penetrations** – Caulk or foam around pipes, wires, dryer vents, and AC lines DIY
- [ ] **Inspect siding and trim** – Look for loose boards, gaps, peeling paint, and soft or rotted wood DIY
- [ ] **Repoint stone and brick** – Older masonry needs a soft, lime-based mortar, not modern Portland cement PRO
- [ ] **Check sill plates and rim joists** – Probe for rot or insect damage where wood meets the foundation DIY
- [ ] **Clean and cover dryer and exhaust vents** – Confirm flappers close and vents are clear of lint and nests DIY
- [ ] **Keep soil and mulch below siding** – Maintain 6 to 8 inches of clearance to prevent rot and pests DIY

08 BASEMENT AND CRAWLSPACE

Warm, dry, and sealed below means fewer frozen pipes and cold floors above

- [ ] **Check for moisture** – Look for damp walls, puddles, musty odors, and white mineral deposits DIY
- [ ] **Seal and insulate rim joists** – Rigid foam with sealed edges or closed-cell spray foam PRO

- [ ] **Close or cover crawlspace vents** – Prevents freezing in vented crawlspaces during cold months — DIY
- [ ] **Inspect the vapor barrier** – Crawlspace plastic should be intact and lapped up the walls — DIY
- [ ] **Clean or service the dehumidifier** – Drain lines clear, filter clean, set to 45 to 50 percent — DIY
- [ ] **Insulate bulkhead doors** – Weatherstrip and seal old steel bulkheads — DIY
- [ ] **Store valuables off the floor** – Use shelving or plastic bins in case of water intrusion — DIY

09 FIREPLACES AND WOOD STOVES

Clean and inspect yearly if you burn wood

- [ ] **Schedule a chimney sweep and inspection** – Look for a CSIA-certified sweep; Level 2 inspection when buying or changing appliances — PRO
- [ ] **Check the damper** – It should open and close fully and seal tight — DIY
- [ ] **Inspect the firebox** – Look for cracked firebrick and failing mortar joints — DIY
- [ ] **Check gas fireplace operation** – Have the pilot, valve, and venting serviced — PRO
- [ ] **Stack firewood properly** – Store at least 20 feet from the house, off the ground, and covered on top — DIY
- [ ] **Burn seasoned wood only** – Dry hardwood seasoned 6 to 12 months reduces creosote buildup — DIY
- [ ] **Keep a metal ash bucket with a lid** – Store ashes outside, away from the house and deck — DIY

10 SAFETY AND ELECTRICAL

Winter brings more fires and carbon monoxide incidents than any other season

- [ ] **Test smoke alarms** – One on every level, in every bedroom, and outside sleeping areas — DIY
- [ ] **Test carbon monoxide alarms** – One on every level and near sleeping areas; required with fuel-burning appliances — DIY
- [ ] **Replace batteries and aging alarms** – Replace smoke alarms at 10 years and CO alarms at 5 to 7 years — DIY
- [ ] **Check fire extinguishers** – Gauge in the green; one in the kitchen, garage, and near the furnace — DIY
- [ ] **Test GFCI and AFCI outlets** – Press test and reset; replace any that fail — DIY
- [ ] **Use space heaters safely** – Plug directly into the wall and keep 3 feet of clearance — DIY
- [ ] **Service the generator** – Change oil, test-run under load, and stock fresh fuel with stabilizer — DIY
- [ ] **Never run generators near openings** – Operate outdoors at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents — DIY
- [ ] **Consider a whole-house generator or transfer switch** – Must be installed by a licensed electrician — PRO

11 YARD, DECK, AND OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT

Put the warm season away properly so it is ready in spring

- [ ] **Drain and winterize mowers and power equipment** – Run out the fuel or add stabilizer; change the oil — DIY
- [ ] **Service the snow blower** – Fresh oil, spark plug, shear pins, and a test start — DIY
- [ ] **Stock snow and ice supplies** – Shovels, ice melt safe for concrete and pets, and sand for traction — DIY
- [ ] **Mark driveway and walkway edges** – Use reflective stakes to guide plows and protect lawn edges — DIY
- [ ] **Clean and seal the deck** – Clear debris between boards; check railings, stairs, and ledger flashing — DIY

- [ ] **Store or cover patio furniture and grills** – Disconnect propane tanks and store them outdoors upright DIY
- [ ] **Repair walkway and driveway cracks** – Sealing before winter prevents freeze-thaw heaving PRO
- [ ] **Check exterior lighting** – Replace bulbs and test motion lights for shorter days DIY
- [ ] **Shut down and drain fountains and ponds** – Remove pumps and store indoors DIY

12 STORM AND EMERGENCY PREP

Ice storms can mean days without power or heat

- [ ] **Build an emergency kit** – Flashlights, batteries, radio, first aid, water, and 3 days of food DIY
- [ ] **Keep warm layers and blankets accessible** – Plan which room you will heat if power is out DIY
- [ ] **Charge power banks** – Keep phones and medical devices ready to go DIY
- [ ] **Know how to shut off utilities** – Water, gas, and electric; keep the right wrench near the gas meter DIY
- [ ] **Keep contractor and utility numbers handy** – Plumber, HVAC, electrician, roofer, and your builder DIY
- [ ] **Review your insurance policy** – Know your coverage for burst pipes, ice dams, and sewer backups DIY
- [ ] **Plan for travel** – Keep heat at 55 or higher, shut off the main water, and have someone check the house DIY
- [ ] **Photograph your home** – Document condition and contents for any future claims DIY

13 EXTRA CHECKS FOR OLDER HOMES

Homes built before 1960 have their own set of winter weak points

- [ ] **Inspect knob-and-tube or older wiring** – Insulating over active knob-and-tube is a fire hazard; have it evaluated PRO
- [ ] **Check for asbestos before disturbing materials** – Pipe wrap, duct tape, and some insulation may contain it; test first PRO
- [ ] **Assume lead paint before scraping** – Use lead-safe practices on painted trim and windows in pre-1978 homes PRO
- [ ] **Look for balloon framing** – Open wall cavities run from basement to attic and need fire-blocking and air-sealing PRO
- [ ] **Inspect stone foundation walls** – Watch for crumbling mortar, water seepage, and bulging sections PRO
- [ ] **Check old cast-iron radiators and steam systems** – Vents, valves, and pitch on steam pipes affect efficiency and noise PRO
- [ ] **Evaluate oil tanks** – Older underground or basement tanks can leak and may be uninsurable PRO

NOTES AND FOLLOW-UP ITEMS

Found Something on the List?

We handle repairs, envelope upgrades, and full renovations across Chester and Montgomery Counties. Call or email to set up a walkthrough.

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This checklist is general guidance. Conditions vary by home; consult a licensed professional for electrical, gas, structural, and hazardous-material work.