

'How to' with Tommy Walsh

Your home and its upkeep is very important to help keep you safe and warm throughout the year.

Let Direct Line guide you through some quick and easy, straight-forward maintenance tips to help show you 'How to' keep your home in good condition.

You'll find some tips on how you can try and minimise the risk of water damage to your home, as well as some basic home security advice.

Home Maintenance

House Layout

It's important to know the layout of your property and where things are.

Your Master Electricity Board is normally found under the stairs

The gas supply tap is usually found near the meter and again, normally found under the stairs.

Stopcock

In most properties the stopcock is usually found next to the sink though it does vary.

Most properties also have an external stopcock, which is the water company's access point to the supply.

Once you've located the stopcock make sure that it's easy to turn.

If it's hard just get some easing oil on it and move it gently with an adjustable wrench 'til it turns easily.

If you have a water leak or burst pipes anywhere in your property the first thing to turn off is the water at the mains. So make sure your stopcock is in working order. If it's not, or is too stiff to turn yourself, then get in a plumber as you may need to get it replaced.

The other areas that are easy to maintain are the boiler, your water tank and your water pipes.

Boiler

It's advisable to have your boiler regularly serviced or looked over by a qualified, gas safe engineer once a year, preferably in the summer months so that you're all prepared for the winter.

Water Tank

Maintaining your water tank is pretty simple and straightforward stuff, and by keeping the moving parts like the ball valve in working order, you can help avoid this furring up and becoming corroded in hard water areas after only 3 or 4 years.

So, check your water valve and scrape away any lime scale and put a small dollop of grease on the pivot joint.

Make sure the lid to the tank is close fitting and provides an adequate seal.

A tip to help keep warm air circulating is to not put lagging under the tank. Hot air builds up between the ceiling section and the tank and helps to stop the water in the tank from freezing, and lagging stops this hot air from circulating.

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Pipe lagging

Pipes are a critical area. New homes should have their pipes lagged as a matter of course, but some older properties may not, so it's always best to check.

Even if you have already lagged pipes it's worth checking your lagging has been done to the correct standard.

Most pipe lagging nowadays comes in already slit pre cut lengths.

It's very simple to use and doesn't need support or ties and can be cut at 45 degrees with scissors or a sharp knife. Just cover with duct tape, taped at the joints to go round any corners.

It's inexpensive and readily available at DIY merchants and trade sheds.

Loft

If you're insulating your loft area, make sure you have adequate flooring to prevent damage to the ceiling.

If you don't have fixed flooring you can buy 8' x 2' chipboard, which you can move around the loft to give you a solid base to work on.

Always make sure that you cover up well, using gloves and a mask.

If you do have a disaster and your foot goes through the ceiling, you're covered if you've added Accidental Damage to your Direct Line Buildings Insurance.

When you unroll the insulation between the main joists just make sure it's 200mm density and then roll out another layer on top at right angles to the joists and that way you will be completely covered.

Freezing Weather

Here are some tips for when the weather is freezing.

Open the hatch to the loft to let the warm air from the main house circulate up into the roof. This lessens the chance of your pipes freezing.

If you're away from home in very cold weather, keep the heating set on a constant temperature of 15 degrees

Frozen Pipes

You may have taken all the necessary precautions but still suffer from a frozen pipe.

Here's what you do if you don't have any running water.

1. Check to see if your neighbours have water supply.

If you're the only one with no water then it's more than likely that your pipes are frozen.

2. Turn off your main stopcock and drain the system by turning on the taps and flushing the toilet system.

3. Turn off all water heating devices like the boiler, your immersion heater and the central heating system.

4. A good way to thaw a pipe is to use a hairdryer but be very careful as if the pipes have been damaged, the water could spray up as it thaws and cause electrocution.

Some people use a hot water bottle tied to the pipes with a towel to stop any escaping water.

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5. If your pipes thaw without causing further damage. Close the taps and slowly open the stopcock.

Check the pipes again and when you are happy there is no leakage under pressure then, and only then when you are sure that the system has fully thawed out, should you turn on the heating system.

If you turn it on before the system has fully thawed the system may explode so be wary.

Finally, once you are up and running call in a heating engineer or plumber to give the system a once over and check that all is okay.

The Leak

What do you do in the event of a leak?

1. Turn off the stopcock and drain the system by turning on the cold taps and flushing the toilet system.
2. Call Direct Line – we can help and advise you with your specific problem, and take you through the next steps.

If your pipe's burst and water's pouring into a ceiling area, you could see it beginning to bulge with the weight of the water.

Don't wait for the ceiling to collapse, place a bucket on the floor and taking care – especially of any electrics, take a screwdriver and make a small hole in the ceiling above the bucket. The water will pour into the bucket and take the pressure off your ceiling, to avoid it collapsing. When it's dried out you can simply fill the hole in the ceiling.

Away from Home

Depending on the weather forecast and how long you're going away for, you should think about draining your system, as prolonged periods of cold weather increases the chances of your pipes freezing over.

If you're away for a long trip, turn the stopcock off and let the water drain out by turning on the taps in the bathroom and the kitchen.

Remember to flush to empty the lavatory cistern and keep the taps open to avoid an air lock. This straightforward check helps give you peace of mind when you're away from home.

Home security

Here are some very simple and straightforward home security tips.

It's important to make sure you have the right locks fitted to ensure that your property is as secure as possible.

So ensure that you have a good quality, approved alarm.

Then make sure you've got your points of access properly protected. You're best to fit all your external doors with at least a 5 lever deadlock, and check they are British Standard approved.

Windows

When fitting locks on windows, ensure you fit key-operated metal locks to all your accessible windows.

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External security

Make sure your home is well lit. Put up an outside light you can switch on at the front and back of the house or better still get a heat sensitive light on your outside walls.

Burglars don't want to be seen, so make sure you keep your hedges trimmed so you can see your doors and windows and you're not giving a burglar somewhere to hide behind.

Always lock up garden tools and ladders as they can be used to break into your home.

And then make sure you've locked your shed or garage, especially if it has a connecting door to your house.

That's some basic advice but if you want further help, ask for a visit from your local Crime Prevention Officer. They're very helpful and they know what they're talking about.

For other queries and information, there's a lot more useful advice and information available at:

www.directline.com

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