



Winston-Salem Regional Association of REALTORS[®], Inc.
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[Tips for Winterizing Vacant Homes](#)

Winter weather can be brutal on homes, especially the ones sitting vacant. A vacant home is less likely to have any close attention paid to its systems and components. This could lead to significant damage resulting in costly repairs that in some cases may have been avoided. Some relatively minor planning could help prevent damage to the home, protect from loss in value and provide piece of mind for the homeowner as well as a potential buyer. The following “top ten” list will help to protect your vacant home.

1. It's a good idea to have a neighbor or friend check up on the home if you're not available or have moved out of town. Once your home is winterized, place signs throughout the house to warn visitors and buyers that the plumbing has been shut off.
2. Clean your gutters and downspouts to reduce the risk of ice forming inside them or causing roof water runoff to spill at/near the foundation. The most common source of foundation leakage is caused from insufficient control of storm water.
3. Hire a licensed plumber to winterize the home. This involves shutting off the water supply to your home, and blowing air through all the pipes in the house with an air compressor. Also ensure water heaters, spas, sprinkler systems, and any appliances that use water are drained. A good winterization on a regular 2-bathroom house costs \$400 to \$800, but this is thousands less than you would pay for repairs and hassle.
4. Disconnect hose from outdoor faucets and drain hoses to protect them from freezing.
5. If the electricity is on: Install light timers and set them to turn on automatically in the evenings. Invest in motion detectors or timers for both your indoor and outdoor lights. Make sure all light bulbs around the house are in working order. If the electricity is “off”: Make sure battery-operated smoke detectors are in working order. It may help alert a neighbor should a fire occur.
6. Disconnect any propane tanks and shut off gas to any appliances that are not needed. Gas furnaces should remain operational with a minimal setting of the thermostat to protect the home from freezing temperatures.
7. Trim branches that hang over the home. Falling branches (from wind or ice damage) can cause significant damage, not to mention the potential for water damage as well.
8. Close fireplace dampers and seal all openings (such as dryer vents). Birds and rodents prefer to make nests in chimneys and attics.
9. Schedule clearing or shoveling of drives and walkways for potential buyers. Make sure buyers have safe, easy access into your home.
10. Store firewood away from the house. Remove leaves near the house under and around the porch or deck. Such material can aid in the spread of a fire.

It goes without saying (but I will anyway)... “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” to protect your home from potential damage during an extended time period of vacancy.

**WSRAR Home Inspection Committee Member
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