

CREIA HOME SAFETY TIPS FOR HOMEOWNERS

For the near future, most of us will have more free time than in the past. One of the things that often gets overlooked or deferred due to a perceived lack of time is Homeowner Maintenance. The following list was compiled by CREIA-Certified Home Inspectors. This check-off list can help improve safety around the home, and prevent smaller issues from becoming larger and more expensive. The items below will require varying degrees of effort and physical ability to check. They include climbing a ladder or step-stool or crouching down to view some of the components on the list. Do not attempt to do anything you are not comfortable doing or if you are not physically able to do. Repairs to systems should only be performed by qualified persons or contractors, and in many cases service and any needed repairs should be performed by appropriately licensed specialists. Most if not all of the professionals that can assist you with any issues, should be deemed essential services and are allowed to work during this pandemic. CREIA home inspectors can assist you with a home inspection but are not authorized to be contracted for the repairs to avoid a conflict of interest.

While not exhaustive, these suggestions may help you get started with a few of your own priorities or things that you have been putting off.

- **SMOKE ALARMS & CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS** – Replace the batteries, or if more than ten years old, the alarms should be replaced due to age and reliability. Smoke alarms should be installed in every bedroom, in hallways outside bedrooms and on each level of the home. Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms should be in the common hallways and on each level of a home.
- **HVAC** – (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning systems) – Change or clean the furnace filter(s). This will help your system work more efficiently. If the system is more than ten years old and has not been serviced by a qualified professional for more than a few years, it may be time to call a professional to clean, inspect and service the system, to prolong its life.
- **PLUMBING** – Look under all sinks, toilets for any signs of leaking plumbing supply or drain lines. Make necessary repairs to prevent long-term damage. While you are at it, if you have slow drains, now would be a good time to use mechanical or liquid drain cleaners to free the drains. Low-flow toilets, faucets and fixtures are now required throughout California to help lower our use of water. If you are not sure whether your faucets and toilets meet the latest low-flow requirements, consult a plumber about changing them.
- **WATER HEATER** – For tank-style water heaters, annual flushing is recommended to help remove the sediment that can build up in the bottom of the tank. For tankless water heaters, an annual flush with vinegar is recommended to remove scale build-up and improve water flow and efficiency. The vent on all water heaters should be checked for security. Water fittings and valves checked for corrosion, leaks or other problems. Confirmation should be made that the water heater is properly secured for seismic safety.
- **FOUNDATION/STRUCTURE** – For slab foundations, ensure that outside water is directed away from the building and that exterior grade is well below the level of the slab floor, to help prevent water intrusion and damage. For raised foundations (those with a crawlspace or sub-floor area), look at sub-floor ventilation screens and access doors and screens, replace or repair as needed. Hire a qualified specialist to go under the house to inspect the foundation sub-floor area. Ensure the house walls are anchor-bolted or seismically secured to the foundation. Any wood framed walls between the foundation and the floor of the house (AKA "cripple walls") should be braced. Make sure there is no debris, refuse, or fallen insulation in the crawl space. Have the qualified specialist inspect for moisture in the basement/crawlspace and test any sump pump (if present) for its operation. Pursue service and repair to site drainage and/or foundation damp-proofing if moisture is found to be a problem under the home.

- **ROOF/GUTTERS** – Usually the homeowner is the first to know when there is a roof leak, or if gutters are not flowing properly. If there are stains in the ceilings of the interior rooms, it is time to call a professional. Homeowner maintenance such as having all debris removed from the roof and gutters can go a long way to prolong the life of the roof and minimize the chance for leaks.
- **ATTIC** – Take a look into the attic. Check for its general condition, signs of rodents or other pests, water stains or roof leaks, lack of insulation, disconnected bathroom or appliance vents. Consider hiring a structural pest inspector (Termite) for a more thorough inspection for wood destroying pests, and other conditions.
- **TREES/VEGETATION** – Trees overgrowing the home, or vegetation against the house can lead to critters, moisture and structural damage. Trimming trees away from the roof and gutters can help prevent problems down the road. Keeping vegetation at least 12 inches away from the house walls can also minimize water damage to the siding.
- **TRASH & CLUTTER** – Now may be a good time to remove some of the old wood, trimmings, furniture or appliances that may have been placed in the yard, garage, attic, storage shed or basement. It is an eyesore, even if only to you. Clutter can collect critters, water, mosquitoes, etc., which can be a health hazard. There are people and companies that will help, including bulk pick-up from your local waste collector and you will have an almost immediate sense of accomplishment when you see the clutter is gone.
- **ELECTRICAL** – Have you had any problems with loose electrical outlets, light fixtures or open junction boxes with exposed wires? Now is a good time to fix those, along with checking appliance cords for damage. Test the Bathrooms, Garage, Outdoor and Kitchen GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupt) outlets to ensure they properly trip and reset. Make sure the power is off when tripped. Don't forget to test the GFCI on the Hydro-spa (Jacuzzi) tub for operation, if so equipped. Lights should all be working, including hallways, stairways, and all rooms. Bathroom and Kitchen exhaust fans should be tested and cleaned as necessary. If possible, confirm that the bathroom and kitchen vents in the attic are not missing, damaged and discharge through the roof vents.
- **FIREPLACE** – Check the interior firebox for signs of creosote build-up or need a cleaning. Creosote can be a hazard leading to a chimney fire. Does the Damper open and close? How about a screen separating the fireplace from the room? Check the (outdoor) chimney cap and spark arrestor, and if not in place or damaged, have one installed. These are important safety items.
- **SECURITY** – Exterior doors and windows should operate easily, including locks and hardware. Outdoor lighting, including lights outside each outside door need to be functional for safety. Solar or low-voltage pathway lighting is also helpful.
- **INTERIOR** – Remove or repair any carpeting that is “curling” at the edges or wrinkled. This can lead to tripping and injury. Obstructions or toys left in place in hallways or in rooms can also cause falling.
- **SWIMMING POOLS/SPAS** – Child drowning is of critical importance for owners of pools and spas. There are newer requirements for drowning prevention measures, and all owners are encouraged to check all gates, latches and other access points for alarms, and other features, to make sure they meet the newest standards. You may find additional information on the Pool Safety Act here: <https://www.creia.org/legislation-pool-safety-act>

If you are unable to perform some of the above checks, or feel you need someone to assist you with identification of potential problem areas with your home, a CREIA inspector can be hired to help review your home from top to bottom, or for specific components. While they are not able to make any repairs, they can help identify priorities and suggest next steps for who might be the right person or trade to hire and perform routine maintenance or for further in-depth inspection. To find a qualified CREIA inspector in your area, visit the website, <https://www.creia.org/find-an-inspector> If you search by zip code, please check the box at the bottom “sort by distance” to find inspectors near you.

CREIA – The California Real Estate Inspection Association, is a non-profit association dedicated to using all its resources for the benefit of members and the home buying public they serve. For over 40 years CREIA has been an association of members, founded on the principle that joining and working together we can do much more to advance the home inspection profession and protect the public than could possibly be accomplished individually. For more information, www.CREIA.org or info@CREIA.org 320 Pine Ave, Suite 1050, Long Beach, CA 90802 Phone: (949) 715-1768 Fax: (714) 632-5405