



Beat cabin fever with winter renovations

Brighten up interior spaces with a new coat of paint - a perfect project when cooped up indoors.

When the weather outside is frightful, homeowners and renters can turn their interior spaces into something delightful. Residents can banish feelings of cabin fever by using time spent inside to make subtle or even substantial improvements to their living areas.

Individuals may find that winter is a great time to tackle delayed or unfinished projects or to put plans for major renovations in motion. Homeowners may find that they have some extra time on their hands when weather and early evening darkness reduces how much time they can spend outdoors. The following projects can help homeowners make the most of their time indoors.

· **Start painting.** One of the easiest ways to transform the look of a room is with a fresh coat of paint. Painting a room or rooms is an inexpensive project that can be completed over the course of a single weekend. Painting in lighter colors can help illuminate dark

spaces and make a home feel more vivid and inviting, especially during the winter. And painting need not be reserved for walls only. Homeowners may want to sand and paint furniture to give items a trendy arts-and-crafts feel.

· **Reimagine flooring.** Thanks to the bevy of laminate, composite materials and vinyl flooring options, homeowners can engage in do-it-yourself flooring projects to perk up tired interior spaces. Many “floating” flooring systems are user-friendly and can instantly update spaces. Some systems may not even require adhesives or nails to complete.

· **Redress the furniture.** New furniture can be expensive. For those who are happy with the lines and scale of their current furniture, a facelift may be all that's needed to give rooms a new look. Slipcovers can make sofas, love seats and chairs look like new or blend with an entirely new color scheme. Slipcovers come in fitted and loose varieties and in many different materials. Other pieces can be updated with throws, new

linens or a coat of paint or stain.

· **Address drafts and other inefficiencies.** Colder temperatures alert homeowners to drafts, leaks and even insect or rodent infiltration. Homeowners can scout out rooms and remedy situations.

· **Organize the home.** Rainy or snowy days are great moments to address organizational issues, such as messy mudrooms or cluttered kitchen cabinets. Get a jump-start on spring cleaning before the warm weather arrives.

Time spent indoors can be put to good use by engaging in renovation projects.



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Air duct cleaning 101

In addition to making resolutions and plans, the New Year ushers in chilly temperatures in much of the country. A heating system that is working well is essential to the comfort and health of homeowners.

If you haven't done so, it's a good idea to have the heating system inspected to ensure everything is working smoothly. While this is best handled prior to winter's arrival, in the midst of the holiday hustle, it can be easy to forget about home maintenance.

The National Fire Protection Association says that half of all home-heating fires in the U.S. occur in December, January and February. Failure to clean equipment, primarily creosote from solid-fueled heating equipment and chimneys, is a leading cause of home-heating fires.

While the majority of homeowners are safe, it cannot hurt to inspect and clean the elements involved in most home furnaces and other equipment. Not only will this help prevent possible fires or help pinpoint possible problem areas that could lead to carbon monoxide poisoning, this maintenance can help produce cleaner indoor air.

In addition to routinely replacing the air filter on the furnace, it is commonly recommended to have the air ducts and venting throughout the home cleaned. Although there is no proven evidence that trapped dust and other debris in air ducts

can pose a risk to personal health, many people prefer to keep the ductwork clear in the event particles may be hazardous or contribute to asthma or other breathing difficulties. This cleaning can be done once a year or every couple of years, depending on personal preference.

The EPA does recommend duct cleaning if any of these factors are present:

* There is substantial visible mold growth present.

* Ducts are infested with vermin.

* Dust or debris are literally clogging the ducts.

* You can see dust or debris blowing into the home through supply registers (vents) in the home.

There are many companies today that will service furnaces and heating systems

and provide duct cleaning. As with any business, their reliability and honesty will have to be checked by the homeowner. When seeking a company to clean the ducts in your home, first ask friends and family members for referrals. Also, utilize customer review Web sites such as Yelp.com or simply conduct a Web search for the

(Continued to Page 4)

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