

# Old City Capitol Hill Neighborhood Association

Neighborhood harmony is achieved through communication, understanding and work of residents and businesses

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## Next Event

### Study Advisory Committee H Street Transportation

**Date:** Monday, September 8, 2003 at 4:00 PM

**Location:** Capitol Children's Museum Auditorium

## Mailing List

[Join](#) the mailing list.

## Photos

[Images](#) from the neighborhood



## News

[News](#) → An ounce of prevention is worth effort July 21, 2003

Owning a house is expensive, which is why many homeowners procrastinate on repairs. Real estate agents have a euphemism for it: "deferred maintenance."

Some fixes, however, should never be delayed. Ignoring them is unsafe and can result in more expensive repairs later on.

Here's what home inspectors around the country say homeowners should be on the lookout for:

- **Smoky chimney.** Chimneys that aren't properly cleaned and maintained can catch fire. Creosote, a byproduct of wood burning, can build up in the flue and ignite unless removed, said inspector **Hy Naiditch of ACCUspect Home Inspection Services in Chicago.**

The fix: Have the chimney swept and inspected annually. Use only seasoned wood and build small, hot fires, rather than big smoky ones. Never burn trash, cardboard or wrapping paper in the fireplace.

Here are some safety fixes to consider:

- **Ground fault circuit interrupters.** These electrical outlets, with their distinctive "test" and "reset" buttons, are designed to prevent deadly shocks. Outlets in bathrooms and those in kitchens within 6 feet of the sink should be replaced with GFCI outlets, **said Naiditch, president of National Assn. of Home Inspectors' Illinois chapter.** "They're the best \$7 you'll ever spend," Naiditch said. "They're a lifesaver."

The exception: Don't put a refrigerator on a GFCI, **Naiditch said.** A fridge's normal on-and-off surges can trip the interrupter and leave a fridge full of rotting groceries.

- **Flexible gas connectors.** Gas appliances installed more than 10 years ago may still have dangerous brass connectors that can fail, according to the safety commission, leading to fires or explosions. These should be replaced with an approved connector, typically stainless steel, **Naiditch said.** But don't move the appliance to inspect, since even a slight motion can cause the weak soldered connection to break. Have a professional appliance repairer check and make any changes.

- **Water leaks.** A stain on the ceiling. A toilet that rocks. A white powdery growth on bricks or a foundation. A musty smell. The culprit is water, and the damage can be severe.

"Water is probably the single most destructive force to a house," said inspector Jeff Del Guercio, owner of An Objective Inspection in Throop, Pa., and president of the local National Assn. of Home Inspectors chapter. "And a leak can go on for a long time without being noticed."

Left unchecked, leaks can lead to rot, dry rot, mold and termite infestations. Water can cause roofs to collapse, foundations to buckle and all manner of expensive repairs. What's more, water-related problems can get a home blackballed by insurance companies worried about the soaring number of mold-related claims nationwide.

The fix: Stop the leak by any means necessary. repair the damage and take



### Community Forums

[Discuss](#) community issues with other neighbors.

### New Residents

[Welcome](#) to the neighborhood.

The fix: Stop the leak by any means necessary, repair the damage and take the required steps to make sure the problem doesn't reappear. Minor roof leaks, for example, can be patched with roof cement, but if the roof is aged and failing it may need to be replaced. That's expensive, but not as bad as replacing the trusses and underlying roof structure, which can rot away if not protected.

- Flickering lights. Do the lights dim when the fridge switches on or the microwave is in use? It may be bad wiring or too many appliances hooked to one circuit. Either one can cause a fire.

"A lot of older homes have only one or two circuits in the kitchen," said inspector Jason Farrier of Elite Home Inspections in Phoenix. "People will update the kitchen but still have all the appliances running off those two circuits."

It's far safer, Farrier said, to have at least four circuits: two for countertop appliances, one to run the dishwasher and garbage disposal and a dedicated line for the microwave. In fact, most modern kitchens have even more, including individual circuits for each large appliance and for lighting.

Flickering lights also can be a sign of failing connections in aluminum wiring, a feature in homes built between 1965 and 1973.

The fix: Try to distribute power-hungry appliances more evenly by not running more than one at a time or by plugging some into another circuit. But the best fix is a cure: Get an electrician to upgrade the wiring, add more circuits or do both.

For homeowners who have aluminum wiring but can't afford to upgrade, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends making wiring safer by using special crimp connectors rather than the usual twist-on style. For more information, visit the commission's Web site at <http://www.cpsc.gov> or consult a professional electrician.

- Rodents. Rats, mice and other vermin love to chew through insulation and wiring, Del Guercio said.

The fix: Use traps and bait or call an exterminator. Mouse droppings can carry the deadly hantavirus, and rodents themselves can carry everything from salmonella to the plague, so professional help might be the wisest course.

- Soaring fuel bills. If there hasn't been a rate hike recently, Del Guercio said, the culprit could be problems with the furnace. This is more than a money issue, however, since poorly functioning systems can cause deadly carbon monoxide buildup in a home. The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates about 200 people die of carbon monoxide exposure in the home annually, typically from malfunctioning heating systems.

The fix: Have the furnace professionally cleaned and inspected annually, including the flue. Install UL-approved carbon monoxide detectors, which cost \$25 to \$50 each.

- Peeling paint. Paint is like a home's skin. It's the first line of defense against water and pests. Water that seeps into wood can lead to rot. At the other extreme, unpainted wood can quickly get too dry and crack.

The fix: Scrape off the old paint, sand the surface smooth and apply a coat or two of fresh color. Be cautious in homes built before 1978, since many still have lead paint. Dust and chips from such paint can cause irreversible brain damage in children and nerve damage in adults. Consider hiring professionals to test the home and remove any lead paint.

- Dirty or missing air-conditioner filter. This is something Claude McGavic of Inspection Associates in Bradenton, Fla., sees too often. Overloaded or missing filters allow dirt and dust to settle on the air conditioner's coils. Warm air passing over the coils causes condensation. It's a perfect medium for mold to grow and be blown all over the house.

Enough gunk can block air from getting into the system, McGavic said, causing it to catch fire. McGavic, president of the Home Inspectors Assn. of Florida, said many air conditioner failures can be traced to this simple lack of maintenance.

"With a \$2 filter," McGavic said, "you can preserve a \$6,000 air-conditioning system."

The fix: Replace the filter once a month while the air conditioner is in use. Have the system checked annually.

- Garage door openers. Have an electric eye that looks for obstructions and an automatic reverse mechanism to prevent someone from getting squashed.
- Dryer vents. Clothes dryers cause more than 15,000 fires every year, often due to lint build-up in the duct that vents to the outside. Clean the ducts regularly and replace plastic ducts with metal versions.

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Liz Pulliam Weston is a columnist at money.msn.com.

PO Box 1767, Washington, DC 20013-1767

## **WELCOME**

### **AGENDA**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003**

**7:00 AM – 8:00 AM Registration & Continental Breakfast**

**8:00 AM -**