HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

SURVEY OF HOUSE

To determine repair needs – for do-it-yourself or contracted repairs

You can use the following form to assess your home (HRRC suggests you do this at least once each year). The survey questions referring to the age of systems are intended to help you plan upcoming repair needs; if the system is functional, age alone is not a reason to replace it.

GENERAL TIPS

AREA	WHAT TO KNOW
Shingle Roofs	Two layers of shingles are the maximum that should be laid (slate is heavy and should count as two layers). If you have two layers on all/part of roof, those layers should be removed before reroofing. To identify roof leaks: look at interior walls and ceilings under the roof and around the chimney for discoloration, plaster damage, or wet surfaces; look outside at porches and overhangs for peeling paint or rotted or sagging wood.
Valleys and Flashings	Valleys are areas where different roof slopes come together, and flashings are materials (generally made of metal) that seal against water intrusion – in valleys, between the roof and adjacent house walls, and around chimneys, stack pipes, etc. Both are common areas for leakage. If the leaks are isolated to these areas, you may need to replace only the flashing. If you have the roof redone, be sure the bid includes all new flashing.
Flat Roofs	Flat roofs should be checked regularly; leaks are commonly caused by problems with flashing (see above), ice build-up at the gutter, poorly attached railing posts, and/or damage from tree limbs. Ideally, flat roofs should not be used or walked on, even if there is a door leading out. Use will cause leakage over time.
Foundation	Mortar is the cement-like material that holds bricks together. It provides support and must be maintained. If caught early, it is a relatively inexpensive job (called “tuckpointing”) that can usually be a “do-it-yourself” repair.
Exterior Wood	**Test for rot:** If a knife blade can be inserted easily into the wood, you can be fairly certain there is rotted wood to be replaced. Be aware that rot can extend beyond the visible, testable area. **Sawdust:** If there is sawdust around exterior wood it might be a sign of carpenter ants – they do eat wood. You may need a professional opinion.
Gutters and Downspouts	Gutters should be cleaned in the fall (after leaves are down), and again in the spring, if needed.

AREA	WHAT TO KNOW
Furnace or Boiler	Read the manual on your heating system for special care instructions for your unit – they do differ. As a general rule, gas furnaces should be cleaned and checked each year by a professional, and the filters should be changed regularly during heating season. With a boiler, even if you have an automatic feed, still check the water regularly – feeds can malfunction. In some units, the sediment should be cleaned out regularly.
Electrical	If your house has circuit breakers, metal pipe (conduit), or flat wiring in a thick plastic casing (Romex™), it indicates some updating has been done. The existence of knob and tube wiring does not necessarily indicate a need for replacement – it may be perfectly functional. However, if any of the conditions asked about in the survey indicate problems, you might want a professional electrician to evaluate your wiring, including whether the fuses are correct for the wire size. All wiring splices must be inside a junction box (work box).
Plumbing	To check for leaks in pipes: check joints, under sinks, and on ceilings/walls/basement floors. To check toilets, put a few drops of food coloring into the water in the tank; wait 15 minutes, then check to see if the water in the stool is tinted the color you added. If so, the valve that seals the outflow of water from the tank into the stool should be replaced (usually, an inexpensive, do-it-yourself repair).
Basement	Painting basement walls with waterproof paint will not solve a water problem – and, if your walls are wet, the paint is likely to peel.
Sewer System	Red clay drain tile is buried around the outside of your home to carry water from downspouts. Run water from a hose into each downspout for 2–5 minutes to check if the line is draining properly.

SURVEY WORKSHEET

Check **yes** or **no** for each question, and fill in the blanks where asked.

PART 1 · INTERIOR CONDITION

FURNACES OR BOILERS

1.	Estimated age of heating system? _____ Is it in good working condition?	☐ yes	☐ no

GAS FURNACE

1.	Does anything block the heat registers or cold air returns?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Have you ever smelled fumes around the area?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Does the pilot light go out often?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	Is the blower very noisy?	☐ yes	☐ no
5.	Has the furnace been converted from a coal-burning model?	☐ yes	☐ no

ELECTRICAL

1.	Do you use extension cords? If so, how many? _____	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Do you have a 3-prong grounded outlet for refrigerator and in the laundry area?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Do you have a special metal box plug for your electric dryer?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	Are all outlets near sinks or on the outside of the house controlled by ground fault circuit interrupters?	☐ yes	☐ no
5.	How many service boxes do you have? _____ Are they ☐ fuses ☐ circuit breakers ☐ both?		
6.	How is your basement wiring run? ☐ through a metal pipe (conduit) ☐ Romex™		
7.	Do fuses blow or breakers trip more than very occasionally?	☐ yes	☐ no
8.	Do lights flicker or appliances falter when you turn on the switch?	☐ yes	☐ no
9.	Are there wires spliced together and wrapped with black tape?	☐ yes	☐ no
10.	Is lamp cord used anywhere in place of regular house wiring?	☐ yes	☐ no

PLUMBING

1.	Are basement pipes copper?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Are the pipes going upstairs copper?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Are there any signs of leaks or corrosion?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	Do your faucets leak?	☐ yes	☐ no
5.	Do your toilets have “ghost flushes”?	☐ yes	☐ no
6.	Do you have shut-off valves to all fixtures?	☐ yes	☐ no
7.	Do they work to stop water?	☐ yes	☐ no
8.	Do your sink, tub, and basement drains function well?	☐ yes	☐ no

BASEMENT

1.	Are foundation blocks crumbling, or is the mortar between the blocks missing?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Are there signs of mildew?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Does water come in when it rains?	☐ yes	☐ no

SEWER SYSTEM

1.	Does your basement drain ever back up?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Does your outside drain tile allow water to run freely?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Do your yard drains drain well?	☐ yes	☐ no

PART 2 · EXTERIOR CONDITION

SHINGLE ROOFS (HOUSE, PORCH, AND GARAGE)

1.	Estimated age of roof? _____ Number of layers of roofing material? _____		
2.	Are shingles curled, missing, or worn?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Are there signs of leakage (interior or exterior)?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	Are there signs of rust on valleys or flashing?	☐ yes	☐ no

FLAT ROOFS

1.	Is the covering in good condition?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Are there signs of leaking in the area directly underneath?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	If so, is any of the wood rotted?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	Are railings or posts rotted or loose?	☐ yes	☐ no
5.	Are there depressions that hold water?	☐ yes	☐ no

FOUNDATION

1.	Are there broken, loose, or missing bricks?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Is the mortar between the bricks crumbling, loose, or missing?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Is the foundation wall bowed, or are the brick steps and/or porch sinking?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	Are stone treads broken or pitted?	☐ yes	☐ no

EXTERIOR WOOD (WALLS, PORCHES, STEPS, GARAGE, ETC.)

1.	Are wooden areas free of rot?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Is there any sign of sawdust?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Are trim pieces or wood shingles or siding boards missing, loose, split, or bowed?	☐ yes	☐ no

GUTTERS AND DOWNSPOUTS

1.	Material: ☐ aluminum ☐ galvanized ☐ other (specify) _____		
2.	Are there any leaks or spillovers?	☐ yes	☐ no
3.	Are there any rust spots?	☐ yes	☐ no
4.	If so, are they soft and ready to go through?	☐ yes	☐ no
5.	Are the gutters bent or pulling away from the house?	☐ yes	☐ no
6.	Do the gutter boards show signs of leaking water or rot?	☐ yes	☐ no
7.	Are the downspouts mortared tightly into crocks?	☐ yes	☐ no

DRIVEWAYS, WALKWAYS, AND YARD AREAS

1.	Are these surfaces slanted so rain water drains away from house and garage?	☐ yes	☐ no
2.	Are there any large holes, cracks, or depressed areas?	☐ yes	☐ no

GENERAL

Age of house: _____

NOTES

_____

_____

_____

_____

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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