

home improvements

Most of us spend more time and money looking after our car than the house we live in. We don't think twice about splashing out on our vehicles, so why don't we take more care of our homes?

Paint peeling from the weatherboards, an old sofa rotting on the porch, the overgrown garden and a roof that's seen better days. We've all seen it – many of us are guilty of at least one such transgression at some point – but did you know as of April 1, all homeowners are now obliged to maintain their properties to a national standard? That's right – a section of the recently imposed revised Building Act now stipulates that owners must become more responsible for the upkeep of their property and, where required, provide an annual building warrant of fitness (BWOFF) to verify their systems are in working order. Failure to comply might make it difficult to obtain insurance and could even cause complications in the case of future sale.

On March 31, all councils automatically became Building Consent Authorities (BCAs). Council certifiers will be retrained over the next year in order to be accredited under the new system. They will then officially take over from private certifiers to carry out inspections and monitor progress on maintenance and repairs. For the first 12 months of the programme, homeowners will be issued a statement of fitness by the council. However, after March 31, 2006, building owners must arrange their own BWOFF, sending the original to the council and holding a copy at home. Inspections can be carried out by the owner or any independently qualified person.

"The bottom line is that people need to start taking more responsibility for their buildings and do regular maintenance work," says Blair Wilmshurst from the Waikato City Council. "We need to educate them to take action and properly maintain their houses. Many homeowners are unaware their roof needs re-painting every 5-10 years or that septic tanks need emptying every five years."

Your home is probably the most valuable asset you will ever own, but nothing lasts for ever. To keep your house in good condition, regular maintenance is essential. Time and money both need to be factored in, but there are viable solutions to suit every budget. According to research authority BRANZ, the average yearly cost of maintaining a home is \$5000. If money is tight, prioritise projects and carry out painting, cleaning and minor repairs yourself. And remember to consider replacing carpets, roofing and outside cladding in your long-term budget.

Properly maintaining your home is a sensible financial investment that will not only sustain the longevity of the building, but will also help hold – if not increase – its market value. It's also a great way to keep your home safe and looking good for years to come.

More information regarding the new law is available at www.consumerbuild.org.nz. **H**

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top five home maintenance issues

- > High internal moisture levels.
- > Insufficient sub-floor ventilation under timber floors.
- > Lack of earthquake restraints on water header tanks and hot water cylinders.
- > Damage to pile foundations.
- > Deteriorating timber frames.

So: In the next few years the government hopes to introduce a mandatory log book scheme for homeowners. Much the same as the service history on your car, the aim is for all homes to be accompanied by a log book detailing work carried out on the property. The book would then accompany the house sale and act as a reference for future owners.



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