

# HOW TO OPERATE YOUR HOME

So you own a home—and you're not sure what to do next?  
Here's your operating instructions!



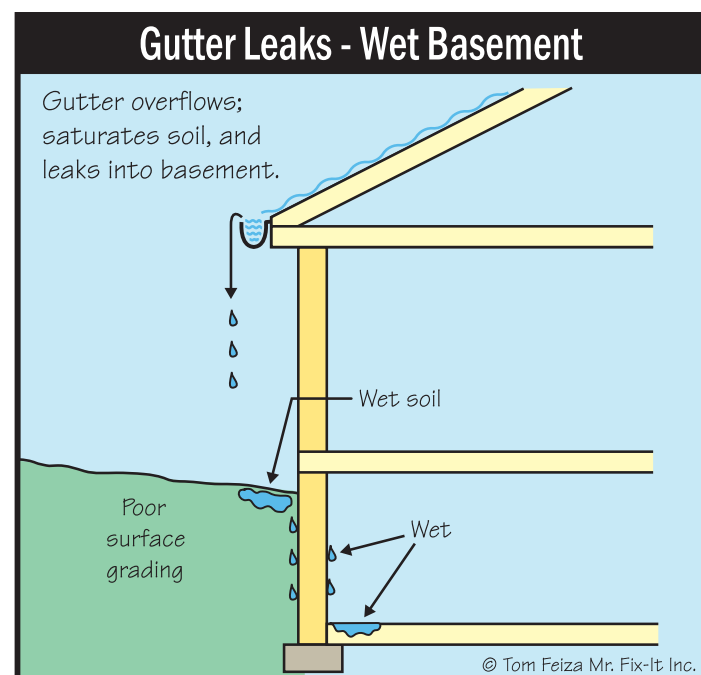
## Are Your Roof and Chimney Ready for Winter?

Check These Each Fall

Each fall we should be looking up – either looking up a roof and chimney service technician or looking up at our roof, gutters and chimney. Routine maintenance will extend their life, prevent foundation problems and help us identify and solve problems before winter weather.

### Gutters and Downspouts

Like it or not, those gutters protect your foundation, and they need to work. Clogged and overflowing gutters can make a basement leak, create a wet crawl space and even damage a slab foundation. Take a quick walk around your home and look for obvious problems. Make sure the downspouts are extended or connected to underground piping. (That kid mowing the grass may have removed the extensions.) Look for loose or bent gutters.



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Get out the ladder; carefully check the gutter for debris, and clean out any leaves and dirt you find. For many years, a gloved hand was the best gunk scooper. Now you can use a special plastic gutter scooper designed to fit the gutter and allow water to flow out of the back of the scooper. The scooper also extends your reach and lessens the “yuck” factor.

### Roof

While you are cleaning the gutters, take a look at the roof. You can also observe the roof from the ground with binoculars.

Look for missing shingle tabs, curling shingles, worn areas, or irregular surfaces. The plane of the roof should be uniform, and the shingles should all look the same. If you see any interruption in the surface color, that probably indicates a problem.

Flashing bridges the gap between the roof and any penetrations; you can also visually check these areas. Metal roof vents and their connections should appear uniform, with no holes or gaps or major movement. Animals and wind can damage metal vents.

*(Continued, next page)*

Featured in this issue:

- Solving bathroom sink odor problems
- Low water pressure? Check aerator

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## Are Your Roof and Chimney Ready for Winter? (continued)

If your roof has a ridge vent, it will look like a thin raised section across the top of the roof ridge. The vent and its shingles should be uniform with no loose parts. Again, the color and uniformity of shingles covering the vent are key indicators that the vent is in good shape.

Metal flashings around masonry chimneys or skylight curbs should appear uniform and lie flat on the roof or masonry. If you see a raised metal part or if the flashing is lifting the shingles, you may have a problem.

Some metal flashings are sealed with mastic, caulk or roof cement to the chimney or vertical section. The sealant should be continuous, without cracks or gaps. This will be hard to see with binoculars, so just check to make sure the flashing and sealant look uniform, without rough edges or raised sections.

## Masonry Chimneys

Brick or masonry chimneys should be checked periodically by a professional. The inspection will depend on the type of fuel-burning device served by the chimney. For a wood-burning fireplace that is used extensively, the chimney should be checked and cleaned each year. Inspection involves looking at the chimney flue from the top and the fireplace.

Chimneys that serve gas- or oil-burning appliances take less abuse but still need an internal inspection every few years. Any professional checking a chimney should also check all flashings.

From the ground, you can check the chimney with binoculars for physical damage. The cap or crown of the chimney, which sheds water from the chimney top, should be one continuous piece without cracks or irregular surfaces.

You should see a clay tile extending above the top of the cap. The clay tile should appear smooth and uniform, without cracks or flaking. Brick and mortar should also seem uniform, with no gaps or cracks. Any shifting or cracking can indicate a problem. The face of the brick should be uniform.

If bricks appear damaged or salt-stained, or if the surface of the brick is falling off, this indicates a water problem that needs

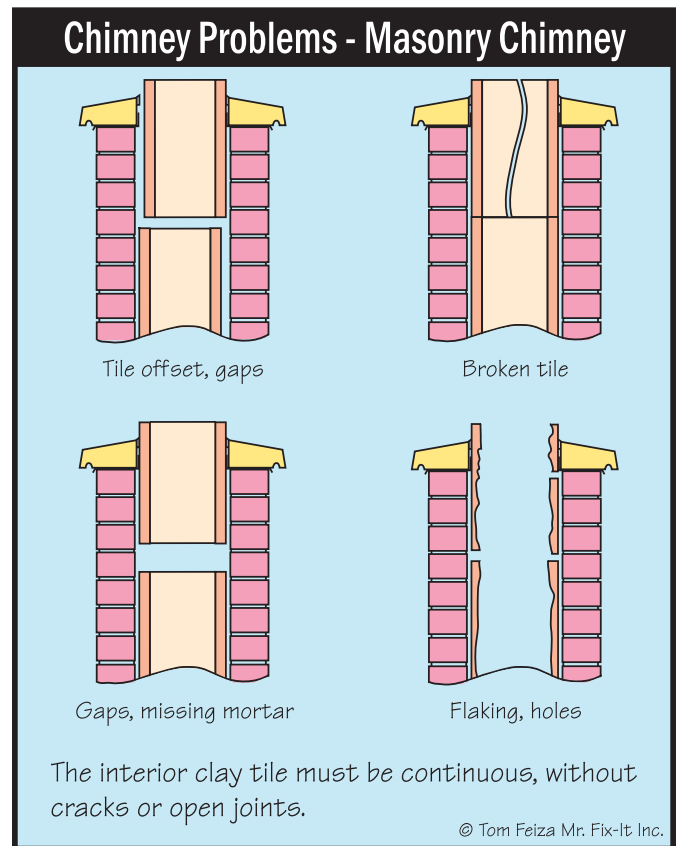
immediate attention to prevent further damage. Once water reaches the inside of the brick, the problem will accelerate.

## Metal Chimneys

Again, a visual inspection is in order. All surfaces should be uniform and solid. Look for signs of straw or yard debris – a bird may be building a nest in the chimney.

The connection of the chimney to the roof should be smooth and uniform at the flashing. Shingles should lie flat. The top of the chimney should not have excessive rust; commonly, it will have a ring or storm collar that directs water to the outside.

For a boxed-in chimney, make sure the large metal cap is pitched to the outer edge of the chimney and is held uniformly in place. This cap is also subject to rust. You can't see the connection of the flue pipe to the metal cap, so have that checked by a pro every other year.



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## Mr. Fix-It Quick Tip

### No water at the sink?

Low water pressure at a kitchen sink can be caused by a plugged aerator. Aerator? Sure. That's the little set of screens and a small orifice at the end of the faucet. Remove the aerator by twisting counterclockwise with your hand or with a pliers cushioned with tape or a rag. Take the aerator apart and rinse the parts, keeping track of the order for reassembly. You will find debris in the screens. If the unit can't be cleaned, take it to the hardware store and buy a replacement.



## The Honey-Do List – Tom and Gayle Feiza Stink in the Sink

**Gayle:** Have you noticed that foul odor in the full bath?

**Tom:** I told you not to go in there after I've been "reading." (under his breath) I need to install a better fan in that bathroom.

**Gayle:** No, you don't get my drift. There's a foul smell in the bathroom when nobody has been using it. It comes and goes. I notice it when I'm cleaning and the fan isn't on. I checked around the toilet, the floorboards, the tub, toilet bowl, toilet tank, in the cabinet, everywhere. I even checked for anything coming in through the window. This one really has me baffled.

**Tom:** You're such a good housekeeper, honey. I can't imagine there are any germs, much less smells, in our bathroom.

**Gayle:** Let's check it out together. Maybe you just don't notice it when you are using the bathroom (cough, cough).

**Tom:** OK. I don't smell anything. I don't see anything. No stains at the base of the toilet, no mold, no cabinet problems, no grout or caulk problems. The ceiling and the walls look fine too. Are you sure there's a smell?

**Gayle:** Now that we're in here, I recall noticing it near the sink. It's just a faint odor.

**Tom:** Let me check out the sink. Hey, it stinks! I'll clean the stopper, snake out the trap and flush some strong cleaner down the drain. I don't see anything else that may be a problem.

(Later)

**Gayle:** Say, the bathroom sink still has that rotten smell. Yuck.

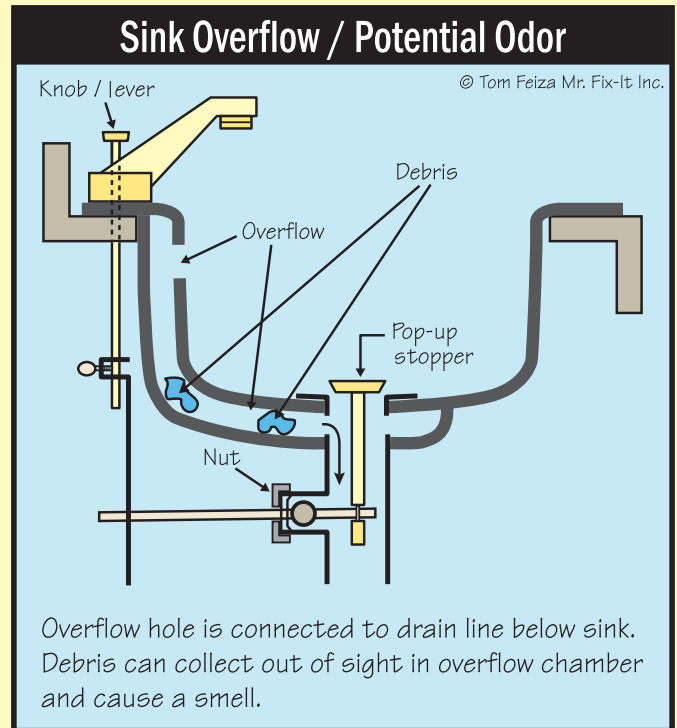
**Tom:** Wait a minute. I bet it could be junk that's accumulated in the overflow chamber of the sink.

**Gayle:** What's that?

**Tom:** Here – look at these small overflow holes near the rim. If the sink is overfilled, water drains through these

holes, through a small passageway, and into the trap. But sludge-like material can build up in the passageway and create an odor.

**Gayle:** I can see some of that "sludge" through the holes.



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**Tom:** I'll use a stiff brush to loosen it, then rinse it away. I'll also make a strong solution of detergent and very hot water. Pouring it down the overflow should help clean things up. If that's not enough, I'll pour in a mixture of laundry bleach and water, followed by a good thorough rinsing with water.

(Still later)

**Gayle:** Say, now the bathroom sink smells just fine. Thanks! Your fix did the trick. Now we can take a look at the drip from the kitchen faucet. You know, it only drips when...

*Tom Feiza, "Mr. Fix-It," is a professional home-improvement expert. His wife, Gayle, keeps track of the couple's lengthy to-do list.*