

Winterize, Winterize, Winterize

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By the time this makes it to publication, and you take a minute to look it over, the winter of 2010-2011 will be upon us, or nearly so.

What will it bring? I don't know. Forecasting the weather is the greatest job on earth. No matter how flawed the forecast, people will still listen and hang on the prognosticator's every word.

Over the five years since I moved back to the Olympia area, we've had some interesting winters. Remember the snowstorms a few years back that had everyone stuck at home for days leading up to the Christmas buying season? My retailer friends remember them, and not fondly.

Winter in the Northwest can offer anything: golfing weather near Christmas; snow-packed streets; 90 mile an hour winds; avalanche dangers in the mountain passes; extended periods of freezing temperatures; and mild sunny days followed by major storms.

I am not a horticulturist, so this article won't have any tips about protection of plants. My message this month is to encourage you to be prepared for just about anything that Mother Nature might deliver in the way of a winter surprise.

Check your heating systems and the surrounding areas

Severe cold temperatures require heating systems to function at prolonged peak capacity. Routine maintenance is a must. Also remember to check all spaces around heating appliances for proper clearance. Combustibles such as newspapers, boxes, and packaging materials can be tucked into spaces during summer time with little

consequence. When heaters are again being used to maximum capacity, any combustibles pose threats and problems. Fires from overheated furnaces, flu pipes, chimneys, etc. are quite common causes of property damage.

Those who heat with boilers have already most likely had their boiler inspected, repaired and ready to go for heating greenhouses. Smaller heating appliances deserve the same attention to maintenance as boilers. Don't let your plumbing introduce the next Ice Age

you without power?

At a certain intensity, heavy winds can impact almost any structure. Things start to move much sooner if there is anything that is loose. A few loose shingles can start the domino effect, leading to an entire roof being lost. Loose gutters, loose shutters, loose awnings etc. can easily become dangerous projectiles in a strong wind, doing damage to your structures and equipment, as well as your neighbors'.

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Below freezing temperatures are also problematic for plumbing. Did you install new irrigation systems this summer? Did you add any new plumbing to your business or home? If so, are the pipes properly insulated? If insulation was removed to do some repair or addition, was it replaced properly? Every year, broken pipes are the source of considerable water damage claims, and many times the cause is improper or forgotten insulation in additions or repairs. One recent study by a large home insurer showed 10 water damage claims to every fire.

Be proactive about the outside area, too

How about trees surrounding your property? Will an early heavy snow storm break limbs that overhang your buildings? Will blowing limbs contact and break down power lines leaving

Act now against the floods of Spring

As the winter storms start to wind down, and spring is on the horizon, the troubles might just be beginning. Even Northwest neophytes like me know that after the snows, winds and rains of winter, the floods of spring are not far behind.

Federal flood insurance is still available to protect your business. Floods, mud slides, land slides, etc. can impact almost anyone. The most important thing to remember about purchasing flood insurance is that there is a 30-day waiting period before coverage takes effect.

People who work with the land are resourceful and generally very careful. There is nothing really new under the sun (or clouds) when it comes to preparedness, so just a word to the wise.