

Opening the cottage

If you have owned an "un-winterized" cottage for years, then you are probably familiar with the ritual known as "opening the cottage."

However, if you are new to cottage ownership, or just thinking about it, this pamphlet might help you understand what is involved in the procedure.

Late in the spring, usually the May 24th weekend, Canadian cottage owners make the trek out of the city to see what winter has brought.

Lucky is the cottager who finds that his cabin has not sheltered a visitor or two over the winter months, be they four-legged or two-legged.

The good news is that unless there is a significant problem, opening the cottage is a whole lot less work than closing it.

There are several tasks that are part of the opening procedure, from the initial inspection for damage, to turning the water and power back on, through dusting, cleaning, and unwrapping furnishings, and calling the appropriate repair people in.

Your initial inspection begins with the outside of the structure: look for problems with the power lines - fraying, tree limbs, or down wires.

If there are problems, call the local utility people.

Are there any damaged windows, doors, or walls?

Has a heavy snowfall caused the roof to sag?

Are there missing shingles or fixtures?

Check along the foundation and the chimney to spot cracks or other winter damage.

This is also a good time to make a note of what could use a good cleaning, re-caulking, or a fresh coat of paint.

Examine the deck or veranda for any rotten wood or lifted nails.

Are any stairs loose?

Head down to the waterfront, scan the dock to see if any of the same issues have arisen - loose planks, raised nails, corroded connectors, supports, or lifts, and other damage that might be the result

of twisting.

Next take a peek at your water intake system for any obvious problems.

This is also a good time to replace any filters.

Once inside, make a quick inspection for structural or water damage on ceilings and walls.

If you turned the water off in the fall to prevent pipes from bursting then you will likely avoid the unpleasant surprise of water leaks.

Before you turn the water back on, check the pipes for loose connections which will lead to leaks when you do.

Look around for signs of mice or other multi-legged visitors while in these areas.

Inspect appliances for chewed wires, corrosion, and, if you have gas appliances, check connectors before refilling propane tanks.

It is a good idea to start the season by having gas appliances professionally inspected.

Check the wood stove for loose

connections to the chimney

Look in closets, cupboards, and cubbyholes for mouse droppings and spiders.

Have any birds nested in vents or the chimney?

Are there any problems in the bathrooms with the tub, sink, or toilet?

Be sure to look at the caulking to see if it is pulling up or otherwise needs replacing.

Check the traps and look for missing plugs.

Go window to window to check (inside and out) caulking, locks, and peeling paints.

If you have a propane barbecue, look for damage from corrosion to the tank connections or the starter.

After the water is turned on, you will need to open line to the hot water tank, and turn it on if necessary.

Turn on one of the hot water faucets that is located higher than the tank (second story, possibly).

Open the pipe that leads to the hot

water tank. Follow the pipes to make sure there are no leaks.

If you have had the phone or hydro shut off for the winter months, call to have them reinstated.

If you chose to turn off the power at the main fuse box, then you will have to locate it and turn it back on.

Before you do, check baseboard heaters and switches and outlets for damage.

Replace any fuses that you removed in the fall, as well as any that are damaged or burnt out.

Now you can start checking for other forms of damage.

Spring tune ups:

Replace the battery in the smoke detector and the carbon monoxide detector; if these are out of date (5 years for a CO detector, 10 for a smoke alarm) replace the entire unit.

Check that fire extinguishers are charged or within the effective period if it is a

disposable version.

Replace batteries in flashlights.

Clean leaf litter from eaves troughs and under decks.

Remove any branches that have been damaged by the weight of snow, or that are too close to the roof.

Clean out the fire pit.

Replace furnace and other filters.