



Is your commercial property ready for the winter? Winter maintenance checklist for CRE owners - by Ron Koenigsberg

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Winter is now upon us. The winter season can be brutal and take a toll on commercial buildings. This means you must prepare your property for freezing temperatures and inclement weather. Is your commercial property ready for the winter season? Here's a winter maintenance checklist for you to prepare.

The following checklist are common winter threats for commercial real estate owners. Use it as a guideline for you and your management team to ensure your property is winter ready.

1. Snow Removal Supplies

Ensure you have snow removal supplies to last until early spring; and
Inspect your equipment for low fluid or old/damaged parts.

The first step to being winter ready is to do an inventory check of your snow removal supplies. You want to make sure you have enough supplies to last until early spring. Make sure you have adequate salt and sand for the snow, and gas/oil for the snow removal machinery. Do an inspection of your equipment such as snow blowers and plows. For the months unused, they can need oil or gas, or new parts.

2. Snow Removal & Cleaning Contracts

Considering hiring snow removal and cleaning services;
Visit sites like Angie's List or Google for contractors near you; and
Check with your existing landscaper for snow removal.

If you are too busy or unable to handle snow removal yourself, consider hiring a contractor. There are many cleaning services and vendors on the market. Sites like Angie's List or Google, are great for finding companies near you. If you already have an existing contract with a landscaper, review the terms of the contract. It's important to know if your current landscaper will cover snow removal.

3. Ensure your Building is Customer-Ready For Winter

Remove snow from entrances, hallways, and walkways;
Invest in quality floor mats & slip resistant flooring; and
Assess all exterior lighting and make sure property is well lit.

Snow removal is important to not only keep your property safe, but to keep it welcoming. Having a clean property is inviting for your tenants and customers. Besides clean entrances and hallways, it's worth investing in slip resistant flooring and quality floor mats. There are various types of flooring that are inherently slip-resistant. Lighting is always an important part of keeping your commercial property safe. In the winter season, it's even more crucial. During the winter there are more business hours of operation during dusk or night. Be sure to assess all exterior lighting. Walkways, driveways, parking lots, and entrances need to be well lit for public safety. If you haven't already, invest in automatic lights with sensors that turn on during dusk.

4. Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC)

Replace air filters routinely;
Clean air vents & watch air flow;
Calibrate thermostats;
Check for abnormal sounds and odors;
Check for cracks/inefficiencies;
Check for cracks in building structure; and
Inspect blowers & hoses for blockages.

Your HVAC system should always be checked, but foregoing inspection in the winter can lead to huge damage and expenses. Abnormal sounds or odors can signal damaged or failing components. Other things to inspect are cracks in the system, blockages in the blowers and hoses, air vents and air flow, and the thermostat system. While inspecting the HVAC system for cracks or leaks, it's important to look for exposed areas in the building structure, too. This includes windows, doors and attic. Leaks in the buildings structure will allow warm air to escape, and cool air to seep in. This can lead to higher utility bills. Consider replacing the components or insulating to contain the building's temperature. Replace your air filters at the right intervals. Air filters are typically replaced every three months. Depending on your building's purpose that interval is different.

For example, retail strip centers and strip malls should change air filters every three to four months. Restaurants need a filter change every four to eight weeks. Industrial facilities will need an air filter change quicker depending on its use.

5. Plumbing

Ensure heat stays above 45-55°;
Check exposed and interior pipes for signs of freezing;
Insulate and seal cracks and openings around exposed pipes; and
Inspect for signs of excessive moisture.

The most important thing to protect plumbing during the winter is to make sure the building temperature stays above 45°F. If plumbing goes below freezing temperatures, pipes may crack. This can lead to a huge amount in repairs and an insurance nightmare for you and your tenants. For exposed pipes that are outside of your building, it's important to inspect them for cracks or openings. Insulate and seal them from the weather to prevent broken pipes.

6. Roofing

Clean the roof of high-piling snow;
Inspect the roof for loose shingles and damage caused by ice/high winds; and
Keep gutters clear to reduce ice buildup.

Inspect the roof for loose shingles or other damage that might have occurred from high winds or ice. Ensure gutters are clear from buildup of leaves or other debris, to allow melted snow to run off. If your property receives a large amount of snow, you want to clean high-piling snow off the rooftop. A large accumulation of snow can lead to roof failures, or for snow to slide off the roof onto people or vehicles.

7. Prevent Power Outages

Inspect condition of trees and power lines;
Invest in backup generators and proper machine shutdown procedures for blackouts; and
Encourage tenants to backup data off-line or on cloud software.

Power outages are never fun and always inconvenient. During the winter, you want to prevent and prepare for outages. For properties with trees, power lines, or telephone poles, it's important to inspect for weak structures. A weak tree limb can fall on a power line or telephone pole and lead to outages for your property and neighborhood. Even worse, these structures can fall on people or property. For office buildings, medical labs or other places with sensitive data or items its beneficial to invest in backup generators. Or, you can encourage investment in off-site, or cloud backup technology.

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