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## Button up your home for fall

By Cathy Dausman



Photo Cathy Dausman

As the enticing tang of fall hits the air, leaves change color and temperatures drop. Even in Lamorinda, where winter temperatures rarely remain below freezing, residents reach for sweaters and scarves. When you button up outside, it's time to button up your home as well.

While we may be saying goodbye to pool time, don't forget about pool care. Cris Pacheco of Pacheco Landscape and Pool Construction says true pool winterizing is done only in areas where the climate changes drastically and temperatures remain below 56 degrees.

That said, he strongly recommends continuous chemical testing (at least every other week) plus surface brushing and filtration work. Homeowners using an older single speed pump can reduce their filter pump run time during

winter to about four hours per day, he says, but newer variable speed pumps need to run longer "in order to turn over the water properly through the filters" and to keep the pool water clear. "I can't tell you how many pools turn green over winter and the costs of a 'green clean' is far more than keeping your pool service company over the winter months," Pacheco says. He adds that "a green pool will cause damage to your plaster and when you shock it to clear the algae it causes even more damage."

Turning on the furnace? Fall once was the time to replace furnace filters. Eric Schaefer of Ariston Heating and Cooling agrees it's all about indoor air quality: "Filtration is your best winterization," he says. But Schaefer adds that many Lamorinda houses (he calls 1970s construction "the freon era") were just not built with modern heating systems. In-wall electric room heaters, for example, are just a big short circuit.

"Nobody notices (the heating system) until something breaks," he says. He suggests that HVAC systems less than five years old can be repaired; otherwise it's time to consider a "heart and lung" replacement. New heating and cooling systems require less than half the energy of older systems, Schaefer says, and are designed to circulate air at a constant lower speed through electrostatic filters - filters which remove not only dust, dirt or soot but also smoke. The U.S. Department of Energy says in moderate climates (including the San Francisco Bay Area) heat pumps offer an energy-efficient alternative to furnaces and air conditioners.

Keep areas around the furnace and water heater free from obstructions and flammable items too, Moraga-Orinda Fire District Fire Marshal Kathy Leonard says. Inspect dryer vents and clean out excess lint. And turn off portable heaters before leaving a room or going to bed, Leonard says. She also reminds homeowners to change out batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors when reverting to Standard Time.

Are outdoor decorations part of your holiday plan? Before you set up, check pathway lights to ensure they are in good working order. Clear walkways and driveways of fallen leaves, which turn to mush with just a bit of rain. Rob Omo of Omo's Electric recommends inspecting extension cords before use. Don't run them in the open over lawns, bushes and yards, and don't plug them in unprotected either, Omo says. "When it rains, the open plug ends can be dangerous," even posing risk of shock. Check for open splices or broken fixtures; any loose or exposed wires are hazardous and should be repaired, Omo says.

If setting out decorations requires a trip up a ladder, Leonard says residents should be extra cautious. "Shoes or boots may be wet causing you to slip as you climb the ladder," she says.

Still plan to cozy up to a wood-burning fire? Indoors, Leonard says homeowners should ensure their chimney is in good condition, and its damper is open before lighting up the logs. If the weather is dry enough for another round of s'mores outdoors, remember October wildland fires burn fiercely. Be sure to cover your outdoor fire pit with a spark arrestor lid.

In summary, safety first, both indoors and out. Check everything off your "honey do" list, then do something safe for yourself and your family, Leonard says, like buying a NOAA all-hazard weather radio, enrolling in emergency preparedness classes (<https://lamorindacert.org/>), signing up for Nixle ([www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com)) and countywide sheriff warnings ([www.cococws.us](http://www.cococws.us)), and putting out flashlights with fresh batteries. Then button up your sweater and pass the apple cider.



A Lamorinda resident cleans his roof and gutters Photo Cathy Dausman

Reach the reporter at: [cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com)

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