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## **Fix It or Risk It? Erie Insurance survey finds 60 percent of homeowners financially unprepared for both routine and unexpected home maintenance costs**

**National survey reveals poor homeowner maintenance habits--from lack of roof check-ups and furnace inspections to never-been-done chimney cleanings--leaving millions at risk of major financial loss**

ERIE, Pa., April 26, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- Experts including those at HouseLogic say [homeowners ideally should set aside one to three percent](#) of the purchase price of their homes each year for ongoing maintenance—or whatever they can afford to set aside per month. That amounts to \$2,000-\$6,000 a year for a \$200,000 home. However, a new survey from [Erie Insurance](#) conducted online by Harris Poll, shows 60 percent of Americans who own a house don't have a home maintenance fund, leaving a majority at risk for major financial problems in the event of needed repairs.



Replacing or repairing a roof, for example, is one of the biggest expenses a homeowner may have and often comes without warning. Nationally, the [average homeowner spends](#) about \$6,600 to install a new roof but prices can soar upwards of \$20,000 depending on the size of the roof, materials used, labor costs and more.

Even scarier, nearly one in four homeowners<sup>1</sup> (23 percent) admits they never inspect their roof or have it inspected unless there is a problem. Nearly a third (27 percent) of those who own a house either mistakenly believe their insurance will pay for damage that occurs to their roof over time, such as through normal wear and tear, or they have no idea how their insurance works when it comes to this type of roof damage.

"Our survey really highlights the need to educate consumers about the importance of regularly inspecting and maintaining their roofs," says Joe Vahey, vice president and product manager, Erie Insurance. "Otherwise they could face thousands of dollars in unexpected repair expenses which, unfortunately according to our survey, many homeowners aren't ready for."

Despite the lack of attention to some maintenance tasks, when asked to grade themselves on a scale of A (Excellent) to F (Failure) in terms of their own home maintenance habits, a majority (62 percent) graded themselves an A or a B. Just over one third (34 percent) said they were average (a C), and only 3 percent gave themselves a D. Less than 1 percent gave themselves a failing grade.

Homeowners also admitted to suffering some serious consequences from not maintaining their homes, with much of the damage related to water. When asked if their home was damaged due to lack of maintenance, answers included:

*"Yes, damage to walls and roof due to leakage from a roof that should have been replaced long before"*

*"Yes, did not fix a dripping leak in the upstairs bathroom, ended up leaking into first floor"*

*"Walls in bathroom dampened and falling apart because of leaky roof"*

*"Dripping water in crawl space caused mold problem"*

"Mold in a wall due to unknown outside leak"

"Water damage from improper plumbing repair"

"Flooding in the basement due to sump pump malfunction"

The survey also included questions about other common home maintenance tasks that, if ignored, could end up causing big headaches and costing big bucks.

## Tweetable Highlights

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Question	Maintenance Should Be Performed...	Interesting Findings	Risks
How often do you care for your gutters and downspouts?	Variable depending on region	Nearly one out of four homeowners (24 percent) says they never care for their gutters and downspouts.	<b>Water Damage:</b> Clogged gutters can cause water to flow down the sides of the home and pool around its foundation, often leading to some major issues like uneven floors, cracks in walls and interior water damage. This type of claim, also known as seepage, is a maintenance issue and often is not covered under your home insurance policy. <a href="#">Home Advisor</a> says homeowners can expect to pay around \$3,830, on average, to repair foundation issues.
How often do you clean your clothes dryer exhaust duct?	Annually	One in five (21 percent) admit they never clean their clothes dryer ducts, unless they have a problem.	<b>House Fires:</b> Laundry is part of life's weekly grind. But did you know that <a href="#">dryers cause</a> roughly 15,500 home structure fires, 29 deaths, 400 injuries and \$192 million in direct property loss each year? The most <a href="#">common cause of dryer fires</a> is failure to do a thorough cleaning. Because a lint trap is not a foolproof method for catching all the fuzzy stuff from clothes, lint can gradually build up and catch fire in the heating element or exhaust duct.
How often is your furnace inspected and serviced by a professional?	Annually	Thirty-six percent of homeowners have their furnaces inspected and serviced at least once a year. But, according to survey data, young women (aged 18-34) are least likely to do this (9 percent) compared to their male counterparts who are three-and-a-half times more likely to do it (36 percent).	<b>House Fires:</b> From <a href="#">2009-2013</a> , U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 56,000 structure fires per year in homes that involved heating equipment. These fires resulted in annual losses of 470 civilian deaths, 1,490 civilian injuries, and \$1.0 billion in direct property damage.
How often do you clean (sweep) your fireplace chimney?	Annually	Nearly half (46 percent) of people who own a home with a fireplace never have their chimney cleaned (swept), unless they have a problem.	<b>House Fires &amp; Carbon Monoxide:</b> Unclean chimneys are a leading cause of structure fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association, which recommends an annual chimney inspection. The <a href="#">NFPA research</a> shows the leading factor contributing to home heating fires (30 percent) was failure to clean, principally from solid-fueled heating equipment, primarily chimneys. In the 2009-2013 period chimneys resulted in \$25 million in direct property damage each year. Improper cleaning can also lead to other serious issues including potential for carbon monoxide, fumes and possibly soot to enter the living spaces of your home.
How often do you clean your sump pump and pit?	Annually	44 percent of those who own a sump pump admit to never cleaning it or the pit, unless they have a problem.	<b>Water Damage:</b> <a href="#">Sump pumps are used to remove excess water from homes</a> that would otherwise cause property damage. One survey respondent experienced flooding in his basement due to a sump pump malfunction, specifically. Water damage due to <a href="#">sewage and drain backups</a> generally requires additional insurance coverage beyond a standard policy. Without that coverage, it could end up costing you, on average, \$2,156, according to <a href="#">Home Advisor</a> .

## Lessons Learned?

Some homeowners said the survey got them thinking about ways to improve their home maintenance habits. When asked to complete the sentence: "The one thing about my home that I know I should do a better job of maintaining but don't is..." sample answers included: "A lot, apparently" and "All this survey just mentioned."

## Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of **Erie Insurance** from March 11-15, 2016 among 2,023 adults ages 18 and older among whom 1,077 own a house and are the primary/joint decision maker and

1,151 own a house. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact Leah Knapp at [leah.knapp@erieinsurance.com](mailto:leah.knapp@erieinsurance.com).

#### **About The Harris Poll**

Over the last 5 decades, Harris Polls have become media staples. With comprehensive experience and precise technique in public opinion polling, along with a proven track record of uncovering consumers' motivations and behaviors, The Harris Poll has gained strong brand recognition around the world. The Harris Poll offers a diverse portfolio of proprietary client solutions to transform relevant insights into actionable foresight for a wide range of industries including health care, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer packaged goods. [Contact](#) us for more information.

#### **About Erie Insurance**

According to A.M. Best Company, Erie Insurance Group, based in Erie, Pennsylvania, is the 10th largest homeowners insurer and 12th largest automobile insurer in the United States based on direct premiums written and the 15th largest property/casualty insurer in the United States based on total lines net premium written. The Group, rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best Company, has more than 5 million policies in force and operates in 12 states and the District of Columbia. Erie Insurance Group is a FORTUNE 500 company, a Barron's 500 company and has been recognized by Forbes as one of America's 50 Most Trustworthy Financial Companies.

News releases and more information about Erie Insurance Group are available at [www.erieinsurance.com](http://www.erieinsurance.com).

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. adults who own a house and are a primary/joint decision maker of home maintenance, referred to throughout this release as "homeowners"

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