



### **ABOUT YOUR HOME**

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### **Get ready, Set, Go...**

The dastardly winter of '07/'08 has finally departed the northerly regions of the U.S. Now, a great flock of snowbirds will migrate up I-95 and I-75 to return to family, friends, and fair weather, leaving behind a vast number of empty homes and condominiums. If you are one in the fleeing flock, consider some tips on tidying up your abode to help ensure your southern nest will be cozy and fit for you return.

Outside, expect Mother Nature to throw a tantrum or two. Have your trees and shrubs pruned clear of roof, walls, and power lines. Ensure your downspouts are clean and have proper leaders and splash blocks installed to ensure water drains at least six feet away from your home's foundation. Bring inside any loose or unsecured items, like lawn furniture, garbage cans, barbeque grills, and planters. Secure loose sections of fencing or gates, and verify your mailbox stands firmly in the ground. Batten storm shutters over all windows, doors, skylights, patio areas, and garage door openings. Verify shutter regulations with your condo or home owners' association.

Inside, attend to drains, utilities, and indoor air quality. Where ever your home has an interior drain, take extra care. During extended periods without use, water that is normally captive in the “P-trap” below every drain opening will evaporate, allowing sewer fumes to enter your home. For most drains, I recommend covering them to be air-tight. You can use a rubber stopper for kitchen and laundry sinks. For kitchen sinks with food disposals, pour half a cup of vegetable oil in while it is turned on. This will help prevent the metal parts from corroding. Then turn it off and seal the drain.

In bathroom sinks, close the stopper, but remember bathroom sink drains also have an overflow drain out of sight on the inner lip of the bowl. It too needs to be sealed with something that will not get lodged; a small piece of duct tape will do the trick. For tubs, close the stopper and use another piece of duct tape to cover the overflow drain, usually found on the bottom side of the cover for the drain lever. For shower stalls, use a piece of flat rubber, or again, duct tape to seal the drain opening. In whirlpool spas, before sealing the drain, fill the spa with water and operate. While it’s running, pour an antibacterial solution, approved by the manufacturer, into the water for circulation through the intake, distribution, and discharge lines. Drain it, then seal the drain opening and the overflow opening.

For toilets, leave water in both the bowl and tank. Remove the tank cover.

Dispense a teaspoon of bleach into both the bowl and tank to kill bacteria and mold.

Cover each with plastic wrap to prevent evaporation, then re-install the tank lid.

Remember your clothes washer also has a drain. Remove the machine's drain hose from the drain opening, then seal the opening with a piece of duct tape.

To protect appliances and electronics from surges of electricity, unplug all items not needed while you are away, like TVs, refrigerators, microwaves, laundry machines, and computers. Be sure to prop open refrigerator doors and clean the interior surfaces.

Take laptop computers with you, and place tower units up and off the floor.

To protect your precious data, make and take a complete set of back-up files with you. Place your legal documents in a safe deposit box. For insurance purposes, take photographs of both the interior and exterior of your home to capture all your possessions, and take the photos with you.

If you have a fireplace, tightly close the flue. From outside your house, look closely at the chimney top to ensure the cap/cover is in place to keep out rain water.

To prevent the growth of mold or mildew, be sure to leave your air conditioner on. Set your thermostat to 78 degrees or lower (Cooler is better). Set your humidistat to 70% or less (60% is better). Install a new air filter in the air handler or return air grill to improve air flow and remove accumulated debris from the system. Hire a

contractor to clean your air conditioning condensate drain line to avoid back-ups, especially if you live above another person's residence.

Open all closet, pantry and cabinet doors to allow air circulation; otherwise, mold and mildew will take hold. If you are physically able, move large pieces of furniture, like headboards, dressers, and sofas, away from walls, also to allow effective movement of air.

In your electrical panel, shut off the power to your water heater and electric range. Locate your home's main water valve and shut it off; however, do not drain the water from your water pipes. That leaves air pockets which allow bacteria to grow. If you have propane or natural gas, shut off the main supply valve.

To save money, call your phone and T.V. utility companies to request a suspension of your service. (until you return)

Finally, check every window, skylight, and door to confirm each is fully closed and locked. Leave a house key with a neighbor or friend, and have your home checked once each week. If you live in a condo or development with a home owners' association, let the management office know your dates of departure and return, along with your contact information.

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