



CARING FOR YOUR INVESTMENT

Maintaining your property is a key way to keep up a healthy rental stream, says **Sharon Newey**.



RENOVATION: MAINTENANCE



KEEPING A RENTAL property well maintained shouldn't be seen as a chore or a threat to your positive cash flow. Whether you are making improvements or simply attending to the effects of day-to-day wear and tear, keeping your property functioning well and halting any deterioration, is key to keeping a healthy rental stream.

Any costs incurred while maintaining your property can be offset against your rental income - as long as it is truly maintenance and not an improvement of any kind - so always make sure you get a GST receipt for tax purposes and keep a record of repairs and maintenance.

And while you will have a good record of expenses to give to the accountant, it also pays to keep a record of materials and products used so that you can match items like paint colours, for example, in future, or know which suppliers to contact if something should fail.

Keeping your property up-to-date in maintenance terms also means that if circumstances change and you need to sell the property, there's no last-minute panic and stress to get the property looking good.

Schedule regular maintenance checks into your calendar. You may be blessed with tenants who alert you to problems (see this as a benefit not an annoyance), but you may also have tenants who either don't let you know when something needs fixing or don't notice.

Get onto repairs and maintenance as soon as you can after being alerted by tenants. If you don't, you're sending a message that you don't care that much about your property and, therefore, why should the tenant?

If your home was built or received building consent after 1992 you are responsible for making sure it continues to meet Building Code requirements. If part of the property becomes so badly deteriorated that it becomes a health or safety risk, you could be in big trouble.

KEEPING WATER OUT

External problems will be the ones that are likely to go unnoticed but also the ones that will cause greater damage over time, especially if they affect the water-tightness of the building.

Make sure you check the roof for rust or broken tiles, gutters and spouting for blockages, and window and door flashings regularly to ensure no water is creeping inside your roof cavity or walls. Check under the house to make sure the ground is dry. Investigate any dampness as it may be rain water getting in, or could be a leaking pipe or drain.

It's extremely wise to invest in simple preventative measures - install a good gutter guard system, make sure trees and plants aren't left to crowd up against the house, make sure rainwater is able to easily run away from the house and have the exterior professionally cleaned to extend the life of the paint.

Carry out repairs as they are needed - a small rust spot beside a roof nail can turn into a leak that then soaks the insulation over a wide area, causing the whole ceiling

TENANTS WHO ALERT YOU TO PROBLEMS? SEE THIS AS A BENEFIT NOT AN ANNOYANCE



to collapse onto your tenant's dinner table. Not a pretty sight, and a much larger problem to solve than just a simple roof check and repair.

AND LETTING WATER OUT...

Water is not only an enemy that might attack from outside, but is also a problem inside, especially if your tenants aren't keen to air the house by opening windows or keeping it well-heated and ventilated. Well-built modern buildings – houses and apartments – with aluminium doors and windows are almost airtight so any moisture and steam generated from showers and cooking, and even occupants' breathing, won't be able to escape. Rooms on the south side of the house are particularly vulnerable to damp and mould, which will mark your paint and damage curtains.

Again, prevention is best, so install extractor fans that are tied into the lighting so that they automatically come on when the light is turned on. Then it's a no-brainer for your tenants.

You may also be eligible to take advantage of the Government scheme that provides part-funding of the installation of insulation. See www.energywise.govt.nz/Insulation for more details.

APARTMENTS

Carrying out maintenance on an apartment falls into two areas – the maintenance that is your responsibility and that which is the responsibility of the apartment block's body corporate.

Generally, the body corporate has to keep shared areas in good repair, and is responsible for organising and maintaining insurance for the building. The body corporate fees you pay each year go towards these expenses and the best way to have some say over what your money is being

spent on is to be an active member of the body corporate. Priorities will differ from apartment owner to apartment owner, especially if there is a mix of tenanted and owner-occupied apartments in the block. What's important to you as a landlord and to others as residents may not be the same.

Most body corps will make sure they have enough money not only for day-to-day expenses but for long-term maintenance as well.

If your property is on a crosslease title, as is common with townhouses and units, it will pay to check who is responsible for what – if the water pipe that runs under the shared driveway to your house bursts, is the onus solely on you to fix the pipe and repair the drive?

CHECK OUT THE CHECKLIST

Registered Master Builders has a great checklist on its website to use as a reminder of what to check and watch out for. It also allows you to categorise what needs seeing to right away, what needs rechecking in three months time etc. See www.masterbuilder.org.nz/PDFs/Home_Maintenance_Checklist.pdf.

KEEPING PAINT PERKY

Interior paintwork can always suffer in rental properties. No matter how good the tenant, no-one is as careful with a home as its owners. Inside, scuffs and marks can be cleaned off, avoiding the need for a repaint between tenants.

Always test the cleaning method in an inconspicuous area to make sure it won't affect the paint finish. Walls may appear discoloured as they absorb the water, but should dry back to their original colour. Don't scrub at the surface or use an abrasive or strong cleaning agent as you may permanently mar the paint finish.

Resene has both a concentrate and a ready-to-use product called Resene Interior Paintwork Cleaner which can be wiped over dirty areas.

Walls, like windows, can accumulate a faint layer of dust or grime. A seemingly minor job of cleaning a small spot can lead to a major cleaning job. If you get caught out, a feather duster can sometimes blur the boundary between the cleaned and uncleaned areas.

Outside, airborne contaminants, such as salt and traffic exhaust, can attack the surface of exterior paint. Cleaning exterior paintwork each year helps maintain the fresh appearance and halt any deterioration. Pay special attention to areas that aren't regularly washed by the rain. You can do this yourself with a specially formulated cleaner like Resene Paint Prep and Housewash, or have it professionally done. For a slower-acting, longer term clean, use the slow-release Resene Deep Clean.

If the paint is flaking or stained, sand it back and/or treat the source of the stain, then touch-up the paint finish as required. Likewise, check for moss and mould, and replace rotten areas of timber then paint.

There are certain areas of paint on a house that will deteriorate more quickly, like windowsills. If the paint here (or anywhere for that matter) starts to flake, sand it back and repaint. Exposed timber weatherboards and trims will deteriorate rapidly so always make sure they have a nice healthy covering of paint.

Moss and mould will grow through the paint surface and if left untreated will ruin the paint appearance. These can be treated with Resene Moss & Mould Killer.

Bleach is an effective moss and mould killer, but residues can affect the paint finish. Don't waterblast weatherboard houses as the water can be forced up under the boards and into the walls, soaking any insulation.

Resene Roof Wash and Paint Cleaner is a specially formulated cleaning and degreasing agent for all new and previously painted galvanised iron. It can also be used as a general cleaner and pre-treatment for all repaints. ■