



# Basic Home Maintenance Guide for Tenants in First Nations Communities

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## Disclaimer

The information in this toolkit is a combination of publicly available information, references, links and forms that is designed for personal reference and use only.

The information in this toolkit is subject to change at any time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# 1 Introduction

The Housing Department and tenants share the responsibility for repairs and maintenance in rental properties.

A tenant must keep the rental unit clean and perform simple maintenance to keep the unit in good condition.

Your agreement with the Housing Department should clearly state the responsibilities of the Housing Department and tenant with respect to any repairs to the rental unit.

Be sure to notify the Housing Department immediately of any important maintenance issues such as a water leak or electrical problem.

This manual will help you as a tenant to perform simple maintenance to fix problems before they become major, expensive issues to repair.

Before performing simple maintenance, it is important to contact the Housing Department in your community. They may not want their tenants performing certain maintenance or may have a preferred way to approach maintenance.

## 2 Emergencies

In case of emergency, please contact your Housing Department.

NOTE: A little troubleshooting may save you from making a call to the Housing Department. Troubleshooting may also save you the cost of a repair or service call.

# 3 Troubleshooting

## 3.1 Electrical

### 3.1.1 Overloaded Electrical Circuit (Circuit breaker trips)



Figure 1 - Overloaded plug

When a circuit becomes overloaded it breaks the circuit breaker. This happens when there are devices such as phones, laptops, gaming systems, televisions, coffee pots, hair dryers and surround sound systems all

plugged in to the same outlet. Appliances such as hair dryers, microwaves, toasters and kettles that generate heat tend to draw a lot of electrical current. Someone just adds one more appliance into the outlet, and the power or lights go out.

If circuit overload occurs, unplug one or more of the appliances and reset the breaker. If tripping reoccurs, contact your Housing Department.

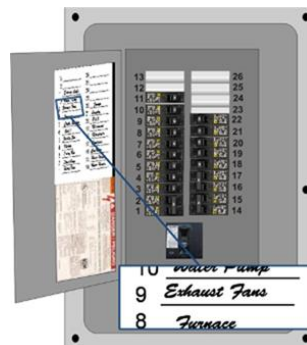


Figure 2 - Circuit breaker

### 3.2 Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters

A ground fault circuit interrupter (G.F.C.I.) protects your exterior plugs and those in your bathrooms or near a kitchen sink.

This device will either be in the plug itself or be a dedicated breaker in your electrical panel.

It is designed to trip when grounding occurs due to damp conditions, or when extension cords are excessively long and/or in poor condition, or if appliances are faulty/old.

If the appliance stops working, ensure that appliances and extension cords are unplugged, then reset the G.F.C.I.

If the GFCI receptacle is working properly, pushing the “test” (bottom) button will cause the top button to pop out. You should hear a sharp “click” upon pressing the test button. After you have pressed the reset button, check to see if all your plugs are now working.



Figure 3 G.F.C.I plug

This link shows how to reset a G.F.C.I. plug:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trLeLJdMWWI>

### 3.2.1 Plugs and Outlets

If a plug or outlet sparks excessively, immediately turn off the breaker and contact your Housing department. A small spark when an appliance is unplugged is not uncommon.

### 3.2.2 No power/electricity to your unit

If all the power in your home goes out, check to see if there is a power blackout in your community. If not, check your main breaker (in the electrical panel) and reset it after checking for a current overload.

To do this, locate and open the door on your electrical panel. Look for a breaker that has moved from the “on” position to the “off” position (also known as a tripped breaker), or is halfway between the two.



*Figure 4- Tripped breaker*

Move the breaker to the full “off” position, and then move it to the full “on” position. This will restore power to that circuit.

If power is not restored, it may be a sign of a more serious electrical problem and you should contact the Housing Department.

This website has a good video on how to fix a tripped breaker:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf-m1QisJ6c>

NOTE: Electricity can be dangerous. Always make sure your hands are dry and you’re standing on a dry surface when working on your electrical panel.



### 3.3 Heating/Furnace

If your furnace is not operating, ensure that the breaker has not tripped.

Check the thermostat setting to ensure it has not been turned down.

This website has a good video on how to address the problem of no heat in your unit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgOnfG62aBM>

NOTE: Refer to your furnace manual to check lighting procedures.

#### 3.3.1 Your furnace filter

Your furnace has a filter. They are designed to trap dust, dirt, and airborne particulates before they can get into the system and potentially damage the fan or the heating coil. Since most of the air in your house circulates through your HVAC system, furnace filters are your first line of defense against dust and airborne allergens.

So how do you know when it's time to change a furnace filter? Here are some general guidelines—although, as always, it is a good idea to check your owner's manual for the manufacturer's maintenance recommendations.

Typically, you should change a furnace filter every one to two months if:

- you have one or more furry pets
- you notice excessive to moderate dust buildup in your house
- people in your home smoke
- your heating system fan runs most of the time
- you open your doors and windows frequently
- if you notice dust or dirt buildup on your current filter

This website shows how to change a furnace filter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lO4xAsTyqM>



Figure 5 - Forced air furnace



Figure 6 - Furnace filter

## 4 Natural Gas / Propane Gas

If, at any time, you smell gas, contact your Housing Department immediately. They will check your system and advise you of any problems.

## 5 Roof Leaks

If a roof leak occurs, ensure the roof is the source of the leaking.

Check for the following:

1. Plugged gutters or downspouts
2. Debris on the roof
3. Ice damage
4. Missing roof shingles

Place a bucket under the leak to protect your home and contact your Housing Department.

## 6 Inside Repairs and Maintenance

### 6.1 Attic

Access to the attic is for the inspection and maintenance of insulation, vents, chimneys, or other mechanical equipment that may be installed in the attic.

Attic space is not designed or intended for storage.

If you or any service people perform maintenance or inspections in the attic, step on the trusses or wood members. Stepping elsewhere could result in damage to the ceiling below or personal injury.

### 6.2 Appliances

#### 6.2.1 Refrigerator/Freezer

To maintain the refrigerator, clean the condenser coils on the refrigerators annually.

Clean the door gaskets (rubber strip around the door) to ensure the door closes properly as needed.

If your freezer resembles a giant ice burg you may want to clean the ice from your freezer. There are three methods you can adopt to defrost your freezer: you can leave the freezer door open; place a pan of boiling hot water in the compartment and close the door; or you can use a blow dryer.

However, before you use any of these methods in defrosting a freezer is to get yourself an ice scraper and try and scrape off some of the ice. Once you have removed as much ice as you can scoop out the loose ice and place it into the sink. If you follow this homemaking tip then it should so you a little bit of time.

### 6.2.2 Electric Stove

Ensure that the circuit breaker to an electric stove is off before cleaning. The circuit breaker is in the electrical panel in your apartment. Take out all removable parts and place them in the sink for cleaning. Use steel wool pads and soapy water to remove residue on the pans, under and on top of the rings (around the coils on top), on the broiler/grill (both sides).

NOTE: Do not spray push-button range buttons with oven cleaner as the cleaner may short out the electrical system.

### 6.2.3 Gas/Propane Stove

To clean a gas/propane stove, follow the same process as an electric stove (see above). However, do not pull stove out from the wall, as it may disturb the gas line.

### 6.2.4 Kitchen Sink

To unplug a kitchen sink may involve a plumber or someone with basic knowledge of plumbing. However, this is the easiest and least expensive solution and should be tried first. Place a kettle or pot of water on the stove and bring to a rolling boil. While you're waiting for the water to heat, remove as much standing water from the sink as you can, using a mug or small pot to bail out the water. Then, pour the entire kettle of water into the sink and wait. If the water stands in the sink and the clog doesn't move, give the water time to cool and remove it to try again. You may need to repeat the process several times to move the clog, but this often works on many types of stoppage.

You can also use salt and boiling water. After removing standing water from the sink, pour about ½ cup of table salt down the drain before you pour in the boiling

water. Let it sit for a few minutes, and then flush with hot water to clear the mixture. In addition, you can also use a combination of vinegar and baking soda. Pour about a cup of baking soda into the drain, followed by an equal amount of white or apple cider vinegar. The solution will bubble, but when they subside, put the stopper in and wait about 15 minutes. Next, run hot water to see if the clog clears. Repeat if needed.

If the boiling water or the combination of salt, vinegar and baking soda do not work you may use a plunger. If you have a double sink, first seal off the second side with a wet cloth or a stopper. You'll need to create a tight seal around the plunger, so fill the side of the sink you intend to plunge with enough water to cover the bell of the plunger. Place the plunger firmly over the drain and plunge vigorously several times. When you hear the suction clear the clog, remove the plunger and flush the drain well with warm water.

This link is a good link on how to use baking soda and vinegar to unplug a kitchen sink

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGyoyN4D6\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGyoyN4D6_o)

or see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Invxjkna5o>

If it does not work, call the housing department.

### 6.2.5 Clothes Dryer

Clean the lint filter before each use. This makes the dryer more efficient and saves money. Inspect and clean the exhaust duct on the clothes dryer at least once a year.

### 6.2.6 Clothes Washer

For top loading clothes washers vinegar and baking soda can be used. The vinegar will disinfect, helping kill mold and mildew. The acidity of the vinegar will help dissolve soap residue in the wash tub and can also be helpful in dissolving lime deposits in pipes (if you have hard water). The baking soda cleans soap scum and deodorize. Set your washer to run on hot water with the largest load setting. Do not add clothes or detergent. Add 3-4 cups of white vinegar to the water and allow the machine to agitate for a minute to mix the vinegar and

water. Add about ½ cup of baking soda. Allow the machine to run again to mix the baking soda. Stop the washer at this point and allow the water to sit for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Use the mixture inside the machine to wipe down the outside of the machine. Use an old toothbrush to clean the detergent dish. After an hour, turn the machine on and let it finish the cycle until the water is gone. Use a cloth to wipe inside the drum. If needed run the hot water cycle one more time.

Similar method can be used for front loader. Read the manual to make sure your front loader already has a clean drum function.

### 6.3 Cabinets – Hinges

Most cabinet hardware can be adjusted by homeowners with ordinary household tools such as screwdrivers or wrenches.

If hinges catch or drawer glides bind or stick, applying a small amount of silicone lubricant will help.

If lubricant does not help, check to ensure nothing is inhibiting movement, or check for damage.

#### 6.3.1 Handy Hint – Stripped screw hole

If a screw turns but doesn't tighten, the screw hole may be stripped. A quick remedy:

1. Remove the screw and hardware.
2. Dip toothpicks in glue, jam as many as you can into the hole and break them off. (Either flat or round toothpicks will work.) Wipe away glue drips with a damp cloth. You don't have to wait for the glue to dry or drill new screw holes.
3. Reinstall the hardware by driving screws right into the toothpicks.



*Figure 7 - Fix a stripped screw hole with glue and toothpicks*

This link has a good video on how to repair cabinet doors and hinges:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_I0tGwI6wk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_I0tGwI6wk)

### 6.3.2 Handy Hint – Loose knob

Any handle or knob that comes loose once is likely to come loose again. Put a stop to this problem with a tiny drop of thread adhesive-like glue or Thread Lok. The knobs will still come off with a screwdriver.

If you cannot make the repairs, call the maintenance office for repairs before the cabinet door is further damaged.

## 7 The Bathroom

### 7.1 Toilet

Flushing objects down the toilet that don't belong there causes most toilet clogs.

#### 7.1.1 Test before you flush

Don't flush the toilet if you suspect that it's clogged. Instead, remove the tank lid and lift the flapper valve slightly to let a cup or two of water into the bowl to see if the water goes down. Flushing a clogged toilet may flood your floor.



#### 7.1.2 You can fix most clogged toilets with a plunger

Plunge the toilet with the rubber flange pulled out to get a better seal. Push in and out vigorously, keeping enough water in the bowl to cover the plunger. Keep towels handy to wipe up water that splashes out.

Photo 1 shows how a plunger fits over and seals the toilet drain. Wear rubber gloves—things can get messy—and follow these plunging tips:

1. Make your first plunge a gentle one. Initially the bell is full of air. A hard thrust will force the air back around the seal and blow water all over the bathroom and you!
2. Once you force out the air, plunge vigorously in and out, maintaining the seal. You'll be forcing water both directions in the drain, which will effectively loosen most clogs. Stick with it, plunging 15 to 20 times if necessary.
3. Be patient. Try alternating between steady strokes and occasional monster heaves.



Figure 8 - Grab the plunger

4. Keep enough water in the bowl so the plunger stays covered. Trying to force air through the toilet trap won't generate much pressure.

Most of the time, this is all it takes to clear the clog. These links show how to fix a clog toilet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-83k9m5C1lo>

<http://basicplumbingrepair.com/>

If the clog in the toilet doesn't clear, call the Housing Department.

## 7.2 Sink, Shower Tub

If the shower or tub is draining slowly, clean and unblock the tub/shower waste trap.

The buildup of hair, dirt and residue from shampoo and cleaners can impede the flow of water down the drain. To clean a blocked trap:

1. Some showers have a removable, strainer-like piece covering the drain. Remove the strainer before you begin. Put on rubber gloves and clear any hair near the surface of the drain. Gently pull away lingering strands with your fingers, taking care not to push clumps further down the drain.
2. Straighten a wire coat hanger, making a hook at the end. Slowly insert it hook-end first into the drain and then remove it slowly while making a slight twisting motion. You should catch some cringe-worthy clumps this way, but it may take several attempts.
3. To rid the drain of any lingering gunk, flush it with an eco-friendly mixture of baking soda, water and white vinegar (or lemon juice)

### 7.2.1 Handy Hint – Make a nature friendly drain cleaner

To make the nature drain cleaner you need ½ cup of baking soda, 1 cup of vinegar, 1 gallon of hot water, and the juice of ½ a lemon.

Here is how you apply the nature drain cleaner:

1. First pour the baking soda down the drain (The baking soda is alkaline so it will cut through the grease and other gunk left in your pipe).

2. Then, mix the white vinegar and lemon juice. Pour the mixture down the drain after the baking soda. Vinegar is an acid and will make the baking soda foam, providing some agitation to clean your drain.
3. Wait five minutes, then pour the gallon of hot water down the drain. The water will wash out your foam mixture, leaving you with a clean drain.
4. Use a plunger (optional). If your drain is still clogged, fill the shower with enough hot water to cover the drain – usually about three to four inches. Then, place a plunger over the drain and plunge steadily for 30 seconds. If the standing water doesn't recede, repeat this action for another 30 seconds.

These links show how to unclog a bathtub drain:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Unclog-a-Bathtub-Drain>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVC0jecDN9U>

<http://basicplumbingrepair.com/unclogging-a-shower-drain-unclog-your-shower-fast/>

### 7.3 Leaky Faucets

Most leaky compression faucets need new seat washers. Best to contact Housing Department.

### 7.4 Mold in Bathroom

If mold has begun to grow in your bathroom you need to remove it immediately.

Use a sponge, cloth or scrubbing brush to clean mold off bathroom surfaces and an old toothbrush to get into hard to reach places.

Three ways to tackle mold and mildew on bathroom surfaces:

1. Make a paste with baking soda and water. Apply with a sponge or rag, let sit for 15 minutes for heavy duty jobs, then rinse and wipe clean.
2. A spray bottle of undiluted white vinegar will also do the trick, but be careful. Vinegar is a strong acid that can etch tile or grout. Use it only on the caulking and rinse off well — it's always best to do a test patch.



3. Liquid oxygen bleach is another option. It's basically diluted hydrogen peroxide, found in the laundry aisle of your grocery store. Apply it with a spray bottle or follow the manufacturer's instructions.
4. If mold has worked its way behind the caulking, you may have to re-caulk. If so, choose non-toxic, 100 per cent silicone, or notify the Housing Department.

Mold and mildew prevention is the key. It is important to make sure bathroom fans are rated to fit the size of the bathroom and that they're working properly<sup>1</sup>

These links show how to remove bathroom mold:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Remove-Bathroom-Mold>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmT47EIWIOk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmnKWqLphZA>

## 8 Windows

Check the windows' weather stripping every fall to ensure the stripping is in place and flexible.

Do not allow any paint to splatter the weather stripping.

Check that any weeping holes at the bottom are free of debris so they can drain moisture easily. If holes are clogged, clean them out.

Use a mild soap solution to clean the window glass. Do not use alcohol or ammonia based cleaners as they can cause streaking.

## 9 Smoke Detectors

Smoke detectors are usually found in the hallways of your house, outside bedroom doors, in the kitchen, and close to your furnace.

NOTE: The tenant must not prevent the smoke alarm from working by taking out batteries and leaving them out, or by replacing them with batteries that are dead

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/queen-of-green/faqs/cleaning/how-to-clean-bathroom-mold-and-mildew/>

or the wrong size. For his or her own safety and the safety of others, the tenant must tell the landlord when a smoke alarm needs new batteries, or when it needs to be repaired or replaced.

Test smoke alarms once a month by pushing the 'test' button. Change the battery twice a year.

These links show how to replace a battery in a smoke detector:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pt2DdzO4gIM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9iKopZ2NeU>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Change-the-Batteries-in-Your-Smoke-Detector>

## 10 Outdoor Maintenance

Generally, the tenant who lives in a single-family dwelling is responsible for routine yard maintenance, including cutting grass and clearing snow.

The tenant is responsible for a reasonable amount of weeding flower beds if the tenancy agreement requires a tenant to maintain the flower beds.

Unless there is an agreement to the contrary, the tenant is responsible for removal of garbage and pet waste during, and at the end of the tenancy.

The Housing Department is responsible for emptying a holding tank that has no field and for cleaning any blockages to the pipe leading into the holding tank except where the blockage is caused by the tenant's negligence.

The Housing Department is also responsible for emptying and maintaining a septic tank with a field. The Housing Department is responsible for winterizing tanks and fields if necessary.

The tenant must leave water and oil tanks in the condition that he or she found them at the start of the tenancy (e.g., half full).

## 11 Rental Home Maintenance Toolkit

To be developed

Hammer

Flathead screwdriver

lubricant