



Issues Brief

City of Yakima e-Newsletter

City Program Repairs Homes of Senior and Disabled Residents

Through its Emergency Home Repair Program, the City of Yakima's Office of Neighborhood Development Services ("ONDS") helps improve the lives of disabled residents and low-to-moderate-income seniors (55 or older) in the community.

"The Emergency Home Repair Program has a big impact on the day-to-day lives of the people we help," said ONDS Manager Archie Matthews. "We'll get a broken furnace working so they have heat. We'll unclog a sewer line so their toilet works. We'll upgrade a breaker box so the power supply is safe and reliable," said Matthews. "It's both small things and big things, but they all make a difference in the quality of life for the people helped by the program."

Federal funding pays for the Emergency Home Repair Program. Homeowners interested in being part of the program have to apply. To qualify, applicants have to own or be buying a house within the Yakima city limits. Disabled residents have to meet Social Security guidelines and seniors have to meet income requirements established by the federal government.

All of the costs of eligible projects are paid for through the program. Grants are provided to qualified homeowners. There is no homeowner payback required.



This Yakima home had several issues including a falling roof and peeling paint.



Through the ONDS Emergency Home Repair Program, a new roof was installed and the home was repainted at no cost to the owner.

Matthews estimates that about 100 homeowners were helped by the program in 2013.

Applications for the Emergency Home Repair Program can be picked up at the ONDS office, located at 112 South 8th Street.

"If someone can't make it to our office, they can give us a call (575-6101) and one of our home remodel technicians will come to their home, do an on-site assessment of any needed repairs, and bring an application for the program with them," said Matthews. "The technician can help homeowners fill out the application and answer any questions they may have."

Qualified homeowners may also be eligible for help with snow removal. Once the weather warms up, and if funding permits, assistance with yard cleanup may also be available to qualified homeowners.

Smoke Detectors Save Lives, But Only If They're Working

The evidence is undeniable. Smoke detectors save lives. According to the National Fire Protection Association (“NFPA”), your chance of surviving a home fire doubles if your house has working smoke detectors.

The NFPA reports that over a three-year survey period, it found that there were no smoke detectors installed in houses involved in 40% of home fires that resulted in the death of one or more people. That statistic alone is cause for serious concern. What’s even more distressing is that another 23% of home fire deaths during the same period took place in houses that DID have at least one smoke detector installed. Confused?

“Obviously, for a smoke detector to do its job, it has to be in working condition,” said Yakima Fire Department Captain Tom Schneider. “Unfortunately, too many people disconnect their smoke detector batteries or just don’t replace them before they lose their charge,” said Schneider. “People often disconnect detector batteries because they get annoyed when an alarm is set off by smoke from cooking food or for some other faulty reason,” said Schneider.

The NFPA says that its research shows that in a full 75% of instances in which smoke detectors did not go off during a home fire, it was because either the batteries were missing, had been disconnected, or were dead.

To minimize so-called “nuisance” alarms caused by cooking fumes or another faulty reason, the NFPA recommends installing smoke detectors with “hush” buttons. Nuisance alarms caused by smoke from cooking or other reasons can be hushed using such buttons so homeowners are less likely to disconnect alarm batteries.

“People might also consider installing dual sensor detectors,” said Schneider. “Ionization-based detectors, which use older technology, are more responsive to flaming fires and newer photoelectric-based detectors pick up smoldering fires better. A dual sensor detector uses both ionization and photoelectric technologies,” said Schneider. “It’s the best of both worlds.”

The United States Fire Administration also recommends that all smoke detectors be replaced when they are 10 years old. The newest detectors contain batteries that last 10 years, so there is not a need to replace batteries during the life of the detector.

To make sure the batteries in your smoke detectors are working properly, Schneider says you should test detectors at least once a month. An easy way to do that, says Schneider, is to perform detector checks on the first day of each month as a regular routine.

Placing smoke detectors in each room of the house, as well as installing carbon monoxide detectors in home that use gas or any other combustible fuel, also increases safety.



A smoke detector that is properly installed in your house and is working correctly doubles your chance of surviving a home fire.

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Clearing Snow and Ice from Sidewalks is Everyone's Job

A recent heavy snowfall that blanketed the Yakima area served as a good reminder that everyone needs to pitch in to make sure that the community is as safe as possible when winter weather hits.

While City crews and private plow operators hired by the City focus on clearing streets during a snow event, home owners and business owners bear responsibility for keeping sidewalks adjacent to their property free of snow and ice. A Yakima ordinance similar to those found in virtually every other city nationwide requires property owners to remove snow and ice from sidewalks as soon as possible.

"After our recent snowfall, it became clear that home owners and business owners needed to be reminded about their part in making sidewalks passable," said Communications & Public Affairs Director Randy Beehler. "Not clearing sidewalks by your house or business is certainly dangerous from an individual liability standpoint, but it's also something you can be fined for under our municipal code."

The City's Codes Division is responsible, along with the Yakima Police Department, for enforcing the ordinance that requires sidewalks to be cleared by the adjacent property owner. A \$50 per day fine can be imposed on owners who don't remove snow and ice from sidewalks near their property.

Another common problem that arises with every snowfall is people shoveling snow from driveways or sidewalks out onto streets. Doing so is not only unsafe, but illegal.

"Snow that is shoveled or blown into the street can create serious hazards for drivers because it makes challenging conditions even worse," said Beehler. "It's not just a bad idea, but under City ordinance, it's also against the law. Instead of putting snow from your sidewalk or driveway in the street, you're better off piling it in your yard or somewhere else," said Beehler. "Anything's better than throwing it in the road."

Beehler says the best time to clear snow from sidewalks is soon after it falls, before ice has a chance to form. But if ice should happen to develop, there's a right way and a wrong way to remove it.

"Rock salt damages concrete," said Beehler. "The chemicals that make up rock salt can also damage plants. Calcium chloride-based 'hot melts' are a much better option," said Beehler. "Hot melts work like rock salt, but better, and won't damage sidewalks or plants."

Help is available for senior citizens, disabled people, or others who need assistance to remove snow and ice from sidewalks near their property by calling the City's Office of Neighborhood Development at 575-6101.

Tips and other information about dealing with snow and ice this winter can be found at the following link on the City's website - <http://www.yakimawa.gov/services/streets/snow-removal-policies-tips/>.



Be Part of the Solution!

You can serve your community by becoming part of a citizen board, committee, or commission. To learn more, contact the City of Yakima Clerk's office by phone (575-6037) or e-mail (sonya.claartee@yakimawa.gov).

Yakima is our community – Be Part of the Solution!