Before the Freeze

15 winter checks for Chicagoland homes (2026)

One walk around your house for homeowners in Algonquin, Crystal Lake, St. Charles, Geneva and Vernon Hills. Tick each box as you go, and start outside: at O'Hare the normal first freeze is October 19 and the first measurable snow November 18 [1].

	CHECK, AND WHY IT MATTERS	WHEN	WHO DOES IT
Outside, before the ground freezes			
☐ 1	**Hoses off, outdoor faucets shut and drained** A crack 1/8 inch wide in a frozen pipe can leak up to 250 gallons of water a day [2]. Close the inside valve, then open the outdoor faucet so the line drains [3].	Now, before a hard freeze	You. No inside valve, or a leak in the wall: a licensed pro
☐ 2	**Gutters clear, downspouts carry water 5 feet out** Downspouts should end at least 5 feet from the foundation [4]. Ice dams start with attic heat, so attic sealing and insulation prevent them [5].	Once the leaves are down	You. Gutters that sag, leak or pull away: we replace gutters (spring to fall)
☐ 3	**Window wells clear, escape-window covers open from inside** Covers and grilles over an escape window must open from inside without a key or tool (2018 IRC R310.4, used by Algonquin and Crystal Lake) [6]. Keep snow off them.	After every snow	You. A basement bedroom with no escape window: we install egress windows
☐ 4	**Deck cleared with a plastic shovel, de-iced the maker's way** Makers differ on de-icers: TimberTech says no rock salt on any deck [7]; Trex allows rock salt or calcium chloride [8]. Follow your decking's care guide.	After every snow	You. A new deck: we build decks (spring to fall)
☐ 5	**Sprinkler system drained** Water left in the pipes can freeze, expand and break them. Rain Bird recommends a local irrigation specialist, for safety [9].	Before winter	An irrigation company
Heating and air			
☐ 6	**Furnace filter checked every month** ENERGY STAR: inspect, clean or change it once a month. A dirty filter can raise energy costs and damage the equipment [10].	Monthly, all winter	You
☐ 7	**Furnace checkup booked, and its age noted** ENERGY STAR advises a heating checkup each fall [10]. The Department of Energy suggests considering replacement for a furnace more than 15 years old [11].	Every fall	A heating technician. Time to replace: we replace furnaces
☐ 8	**Dryer, furnace and fireplace vents clear of snow** Keep dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace vents clear of snow. Carbon monoxide poisoning can happen when a fuel-burning appliance is not vented properly [12].	After every snow	You
☐ 9	**Humidifier water panel replaced** AprilAire: once a year on most of its models, twice a season on its Model 400 [13]. Follow your own humidifier's manual.	Start of the heating season	You
Water and the basement			
☐ 10	**Pipes on outside walls sleeved, main shutoff found** These pipes freeze first. Fit sleeves, and keep the heat at 55°F or higher, even when away [3]. Know how to shut off the water [2].	Before the first cold snap	You. A frozen or burst pipe: a licensed pro
☐ 11	**Basement cracks marked and dated, water signs checked** Soaked soil can push water through small cracks and gaps into the basement [14]. Pencil a line at each end of a crack, date it, and compare in spring.	Now, and again after the thaw	You. Water getting in: we repair cracks and waterproof from inside

Found a problem? Request an estimate at **anchorandbeamhomeservices.com/contact** or call or text (847) 846-2332. The rest of the checks are on page 2.

CHECK, AND WHY IT MATTERS	WHEN	WHO DOES IT

Alarms and air you can't see

☐	12 **Smoke alarm on every level and near every bedroom** Illinois law: one on every story, basements included, and within 15 feet of every room used for sleeping. A battery-only alarm that is new, over 10 years old or failing needs a sealed long-term battery, unless monitored or wireless [15]. From 2019 to 2023, 53% of US home fire deaths came November to March [16].	Test monthly; replace every 10 years [17]	You
☐	13 **Carbon monoxide alarm within 15 feet of every bedroom** Illinois law. Exemptions are narrow: no fuel-burning heat or hot water, no garage connection, and the local building official's finding [18]. Carbon monoxide exposures caused nearly 57 Illinois deaths a year on average in 2019 to 2023 [19].	Now; test it as its instructions say	You
☐	14 **Dryer vent cleaned** Failure to clean caused 32% of home dryer fires in 2014 to 2018. Clean the lint filter every load and the vent pipe at least once a year [20].	Once a year	You, or a dryer vent cleaning company
☐	15 **Radon test with the house closed up** 41% of Illinois homes tested were above the 4.0 pCi/L action level [21]. IEMA calls winter a good time to test, with windows and doors closed [22].	This winter	You, with a kit. A follow-up result of 4.0 or more: a mitigator licensed by IEMA

Hosting or traveling over the holidays

- ☐ **Lights:** no more than three standard-size sets on one extension cord. Outside, only lights labeled for outdoor use, plugged into a GFCI outlet [23].
- ☐ **Thanksgiving** is the peak day for home cooking fires: about 1,470 against about 430 on an average day, 2017 to 2021. Stay in the kitchen while you fry, grill, boil or broil [24].
- ☐ **A real tree:** water it every day and keep it at least 3 feet from any heat source [25].
- ☐ **Space heaters:** at least 3 feet from curtains, furniture, bedding and anything else that can burn [26].
- ☐ **Away on a trip:** heat at 55°F or higher. Gone more than a week in a freeze? Consider shutting off the main water valve and draining a couple of faucets on the lowest floor [27].

Found something on your walk-through?

If your walk-through turns up a furnace past 15, water signs in the basement or gutters pulling away, tell us what you found. We'll come measure and put the fix in writing. Request an estimate online, scan the code, or call or text (847) 846-2332.

anchorandbeamhomeservices.com/contact

Sources Numbers in brackets point here. Opened October 27, 2026. Codes and laws change: your village has the final word.

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6 International Residential Code 2018, R310.4 (R310.4.4 in 2021, R319.4.4 in 2024). codes.iccsafe.org. 2018 edition: Crystal Lake Code 422-1 (ecode360.com/8614029), Algonquin permits page (algonquin.org/permits)
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25 NFPA, Christmas Tree Safety tip sheet (2025). nfpa.org
26 CPSC, Keep Warm and Safe This Winter, release 26-217 (Jan 23, 2026). cpsc.gov
27 IBHS, Winter Weather Ready guide release (Nov 14, 2024). ibhs.org