THE HEATING HEALTH CHECK

YOUR EARLY WINTER FURNACE PROTOCOL

A failing furnace on a mild November Tuesday is an inconvenience. A failing furnace during a minus 25-degree January night is a catastrophic emergency. Most cottagers leave their thermostat at a steady 15°C when they are away, which means the system rarely works hard enough to expose underlying issues.

Use this guide to stress test your mechanical systems while local trades are still available and the stakes are low.



THE 60-MINUTE RUN & EXTREMITY AUDIT

To find the weakness in your system, you must force it to work under a sustained thermal load.

◌ The 60-Minute Run:

Turn the thermostat up to 24°C. Force the furnace to run continuously for a full hour. This prolonged cycle will expose failing blower motors and blocked vents that a low-level holding temperature keeps hidden.

◌ The Extremity Audit:

Do not just stand by the furnace in the basement. Walk to the furthest bedroom or bathroom in the cottage envelope. Place your hand over the floor register. If the air is weak or cold, the blower motor is struggling to push heat to the extremities of your property.

◌ The Return Air Audit:

A furnace needs to breathe in order to exhale heat. Walk the cottage and inspect every cold air return grille on the walls or floors. Ensure summer furniture rearranging, heavy wool rugs or dropped dog beds are not blocking the intake. A suffocated furnace will overheat and trigger a hard safety shutdown.

◌ The Thermostat Battery Swap:

If your wall thermostat relies on AA or AAA batteries, replace them this weekend regardless of what the battery indicator displays. A dead two-dollar battery during the Unattended Gap will shut down your entire heating system, leaving your pipes completely undefended.

SIGHT, SOUND & SMELL

You do not need to be a licensed HVAC technician to catch a failing system. You just need to know what a healthy system sounds like.

◌ The Smell Test:

A faint "burning dust" odour is normal for the first 10 minutes of your stress test as the heat burns off summer settling. However, an acrid smell of burning plastic or ozone indicates a failing electrical component. Shut the system down immediately and call a professional.

◌ The Sound Test:

Listen for "short-cycling." If the furnace fires up, runs for three minutes, shuts down and immediately restarts, it may be suffocating. This could be the internal safety switch tripping to prevent the unit from catching fire.

◌ The Squeal:

A high-pitched metallic squeal from the mechanical room may mean the blower motor bearings are failing. They will eventually seize completely.

◌ The Ignition Rumble:

When a propane or natural gas furnace fires up, you should hear a gentle "whoosh." If you hear a loud bang or a rumble that rattles the metal ductwork, it is called "delayed ignition." Gas is pooling in the chamber before catching fire—a dangerous mechanical fault that can eventually crack your heat exchanger.

◌ The Flame Check:

If your furnace has a small viewing window on the front panel, look inside while the system is running. A healthy flame burns bright blue. If the flame is entirely yellow or orange, the burner may be starving for oxygen and producing dangerous carbon monoxide. Confirm with a licensed technician.

THE FILTER & EXHAUST CHECK

The most common cause of a "No Heat" emergency call in February is a $15 filter.

◯ The Arrow Rule:

When a filter is choked with summer dust, the furnace overheats and shuts down. When replacing your filter, always ensure the printed arrow points exactly in the direction of the airflow. The arrow must point toward the furnace blower motor, not away from it.

◯ The Exterior Exhaust:

Walk outside and locate the white PVC exhaust pipes protruding from your foundation. Ensure they are completely clear of autumn leaves, wasp nests and rodent debris. A blocked exterior exhaust will shut down a modern high-efficiency furnace instantly.

◯ The Winter Ice Threat:

While clearing autumn debris is the priority today, winter ice buildup is an ongoing concern for those same exhaust ports. Heavy January snow loads, drifting and freezing rain can quickly block the PVC pipes. Make inspecting and clearing these vents a mandatory part of your warm arrival routine all winter long.

◯ The Perimeter Clear-Out:

The mechanical room is not a storage closet. Ensure cardboard boxes, paint cans and summer water toys are kept a minimum of three feet away from the furnace. A cluttered perimeter restricts vital intake airflow and creates a severe fire hazard.

◯ The CO Detector Swap:

A hard-working furnace increases the risk of carbon monoxide leaks if an aging heat exchanger fails. While you are swapping the furnace filter this weekend, press the test button on every CO detector in the cottage and replace the batteries to secure the interior envelope.

THE OFF-SEASON SHIELD

An annual tune-up prepares your system, but routine off-season monitoring catches the mid-winter failures before the pipes freeze. If you cannot be there every week, there is a second option.

Step 1

The Remote Property Profile

- **The Action**: Complete our onboarding questionnaire. We build a customized, fixed-scope stewardship plan based on your property needs.
- **The Benefit**: Data-driven pricing without wasting your weekend waiting for contractors to do an on-site walkthrough.

Step 2

The 15°C Standby Baseline

- **The Action**: We ensure your property is locked at the optimal baseline heat to prevent dew-point condensation and hidden moisture damage in your walls. We actively defend the perimeter against rodents and freeze cycles.
- **The Benefit**: Total peace of mind during the Unattended Gap while you are back in the city.

Step 3

Proof of Supervision

- **The Action**: We conduct routine physical property checks, inspecting the mechanicals and providing time-stamped digital logs for your records.
- **The Benefit**: You maintain strict compliance with your insurance unoccupancy clauses without having to drive up Highway 35 in a snowstorm.

Info

705-710-6151 | hello@kacabacottagecare.com