Regular Brick Inspection and Maintenance

Brick, concrete block and stone are used as sidings on veneer walls and also are built into masonry walls. Veneer walls are standard wood or steel-frame walls with a brick, block or stone facing for weather protection. The wood or steel frame provides the structural support. Masonry walls, on the other hand, use the brick, block or stone as both the structural support and the weather protection.

Inspect your masonry chimney and any brick, block or stone walls twice each year. Look for chipped, cracked, loose, deteriorating and missing material. Any such problems should be repaired to keep water out of masonry material and from causing future damage. You should also check the mortar joints for weak or crumbling mortar. Use an old screwdriver to test the mortar by scratching along the mortar joints. The mortar should be firm. If it crumbles easily, is cracked or has fallen out, have the mortar joints repaired or water will enter the joints and cause additional damage.

A white powdery substance that can form on the surface of masonry work is known as efflorescence. It is caused by moisture bringing salts to the surface. Efflorescence is common in new masonry work and can be washed off. If the condition persists, it may be a sign that water is penetrating the wall through cracks, faulty mortar joints or defective caulking or flashing around wall joints or openings. Have the problem investigated and repaired. If you ever notice bulging sections or large cracks in either a veneer or masonry wall, have the condition checked by a professional contractor. It may indicate structural problems.

Bricks are made from clay and other materials which are formed into shapes then fired in a kiln to make them strong and durable. Red bricks contain large amounts of iron; yellow bricks contain little iron.

Interior bricks may be dusted with vacuum cleaner dusting attachments. Freshen periodically with commercial brick cleaner. Brick may be purchased unsealed or sealed. If it has been sealed, it will be much easier to keep clean. Vacuum regularly, and occasionally damp mop with plain water to remove soil. Occasionally, for heavier soil, use a mild detergent solution, rinse well and wipe dry for more shine.

To seal a brick floor, place folded towels next to carpet areas adjoining tiled areas to absorb water. Using a scrub brush or large sponge and detergent, scrub the floor surface and rinse with clear water. Be sure any dirty wash water is completely removed from crevices. Allow floor to
dry thoroughly. From a reliable hardware or paint store, get a brick masonry sealer; usually sold in gallons. It is a clear solution so it does not change the color of the tile or bricks and grout, but it will give a gloss to the surface. Paint the sealer on the dry tile or brick, being sure to cover all crevices and cracks in bricks and grout. Let it dry and apply a second coat. Thereafter, apply one coat about every year to maintain the seal. The sealer prevents dust from grout being tracked into the house, and makes cleaning very easy with a damp mop. Some people prefer to use a wax over the sealer. Experiment with a sample tile or an inconspicuous corner as some waxes leave a streaky undesirable finish.

Read more: http://www.doityourself.com/stry/brick#ixzz1LVAl3ghN

Cleaning Brick and Stone Fireplaces

If a fireplace is to be used for family entertainment such as popcorn popping, or marshmallow toasting, etc., it would be wise to have brick fireplace front surfaces sealed with a penetrating sealer which contains tung oil. This is moisture resistant and forms a tough coating which can be washed with soap and water and will resist absorption of grease or oils, and smoky soot.

Cleaning Solutions for Brick (Wear rubber gloves to protect hands.)

• Mix one ounce of soap and one ounce of table salt with enough water to make a cream. Rub mixture into brick surface with cloth; allow to dry at least 10 minutes and remove with stiff brush; or

• Make a thick mixture of soap or detergent, pumice, a little ammonia and hot water. Paint the mixture on the surface and let dry. Rub off with a wet scrub brush. You are using alkali and a mild abrasive to remove the greasy soil; or

• Shave a bar of naphtha soap into a container and add 3 quarts of water. Bring mixture to a full boil until the soap melts. Cool. Add 1 cup ammonia and one pound of pumice. Mix thoroughly. Brush into all sooty surfaces and let stand one hour or more. Rub off with a stiff—bristle brush. Rinse with warm water, then finish off with a medium to strong detergent and rinse again with warm water; or

• Dissolve 8 tablespoons (1/2 cup) tri-sodium phosphate (TSP) in 1 gallon of hot water. With stiff scrub brush, scrub brick surface. Rinse with plenty of warm water. Repeat if soot or greasy stain is not removed. More TSP may be added if necessary, up to 1 cup per gallon. This is a very strong solution; avoid getting on skin, carpet or fabrics.

Note: Some weathered old brick (50 years or older) may be soft and damaged by vigorous cleaning. Test a corner. If this it is soft, just dust or sweep it.
Contact LCEF to find an Architectural Advisory Committee member near you for additional information.