

House Beautiful — Patterns of Home Maintenance

For many homeowners, their home is not only their castle, it's also their most valuable asset. So it makes sense for them to try to keep it in good condition. Data from the 1991 American Housing Survey (AHS) show that that's exactly what most of them do.

This Brief examines the likelihood of homeowners spending money on home maintenance during a year's time, how much they spent, and how the probability of spending (and the amount spent) varied by region, income, and other factors.

Home maintenance consists of regular activities necessary for the preventive care of the structure itself, the property it sits on, and any fixed equipment. Included, then, are jobs like painting or papering a room, floor sanding, repairing fences, fixing water pipes, replacing furnace filters or broken windows, and repairs to air conditioning units, walls, or faucets. Landscaping and gardening costs, on the other hand, are excluded.

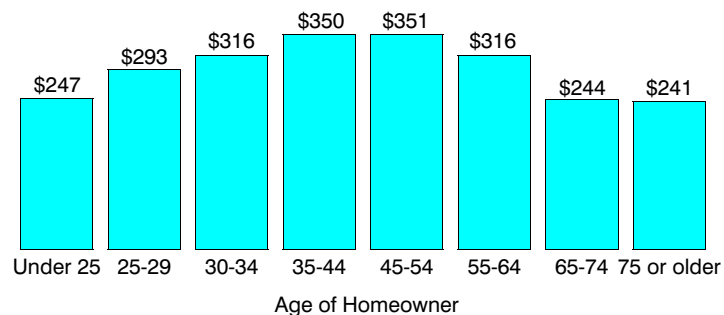


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Home Maintenance Spending Peaks Among Middle-Aged Homeowners

Median annual spending for maintenance (among homeowners who spent anything), by age of owner: 1991



Over the course of a year, most homeowners spend money on maintenance.

In 1991, just over 6 in 10 homeowners had *spent money* on home maintenance in the past year. Of course, some jobs can be done at no cost (like owners using up an old can of paint to do their own painting), so this figure understates the number of owners who did work. Owners who spent money paid a median of \$315 (an average of \$26 a month) during the year.

Maintenance spending is linked to income level.

As the table on back shows, both the likelihood of paying for and the median amount spent on maintenance generally rose with income.

Consequently, high-income households (those with an income of \$100,000 or more) were disproportionately represented

among the "big spenders." Though they made up 8 percent of owners paying for maintenance, they comprised 17 percent of those who spent \$1,000 or more during the year. The opposite was true of low-income owners (those with an income under \$20,000). They comprised 20 percent of those who paid for maintenance, but only 13 percent of those who spent \$1,000 or more.

Homeowners in the Northeast spend the most.

Northeastern owners led the Nation in spending, shelling out an annual median of \$400. Western owners were second at \$360. Those in the South (\$286) and Midwest (\$253) trailed.

Not only did Northeastern owners spend more, they were the likeliest to spend. Nearly two in three owners there (66 percent) paid for maintenance, compared with about 64 percent in both

the West and the Midwest, and 56 percent in the South.

Surprisingly, the fact that homes were older in the Northeast than elsewhere doesn't appear to be the reason for the region's higher maintenance rates. Units built before 1950 were actually *less* likely to have maintenance done to them than those built during the 1970's and early '80's! Since the likelihood and amount spent generally increase with home size and income, larger home sizes and a relatively high median household income were more likely factors in the Northeast's lead in both the likelihood of spending and amount spent.

The elderly and persons living alone are likelier to let maintenance work slide.

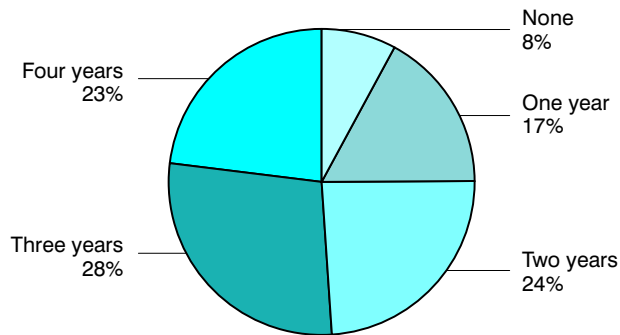
The elderly, who represented 26 percent of all homeowners, constituted more than one-third of those who had not paid for any maintenance recently. It probably wasn't a coincidence, then, that owners aged 65 years and older had a better chance of having severe or moderate housing problems than owners aged 35 to 64 years.

Likewise, persons living alone (no matter what age) also tended to let maintenance costs slide — about half of them had spent absolutely nothing in the last year. (The figure for all owners was 39 percent.)

Two more groups that, at first glance anyway, would seem to be avoiding maintenance costs were owners living in large multi-unit structures (10 or more units) and those in mobile homes. Sixty-two percent of the former and 48 percent of the latter group had no maintenance costs in the last year. The figure for owners in multiunit structures, however, was a bit deceptive — costs for those not reporting any were probably included

Many Owners Perform Consistent Maintenance

How many of the following years long-term owners paid for home maintenance work: 1985, 1987, 1989, and 1991



in condominium or homeowner association fees.

Many are consistent spenders.

Nearly 1 in 4 "long term owners" (those who lived in the same home in 1985, 1987, 1989, and 1991 and were interviewed in the American Housing Survey each of those years) were consistent spenders — they paid for maintenance work in the year prior to the survey each of the four survey years. At the other end of the continuum, only a small group (about 8 percent) paid nothing each of those years. See graph above.

Long-term owners with a consistent history of paying for maintenance had much higher median household incomes in 1991 than those who spent nothing each year (\$46,102 compared with \$18,285). The consistent spenders were also younger (a median of 51 years compared with 70 years).

More information:

Homeowners, Home Maintenance, and Home Improvements: 1991. Current Housing Reports, Series H121/93-4. Contact Customer Services (301-763-4100) for ordering information.

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This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current policy interest. All statistics are subject to sampling variability, as well as survey design deficiencies, respondent classification errors, and data processing mistakes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources.

Household Income and Maintenance Spending

Owner's household income	Percent paying for home maintenance in the last year: 1991	Median spent on maintenance
Less than \$20,000	48%	\$227
\$20,000 to \$39,999	60%	\$245
\$40,000 to \$59,999	68%	\$338
\$60,000 to \$79,999	71%	\$405
\$80,000 to \$99,999	71%	\$495
\$100,000 or more	68%	\$683