



Economic Stimulus Response

Weatherization Tips

Release date: 4/27/2009, 692 words

Small Weatherization Steps Yield Big Results

Weatherization—the process of sealing air leaks and properly insulating a home—can produce an average energy savings of \$358 per year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

And good news! Through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, known as the stimulus bill, you can recover 30 percent of the cost—up to \$1,500—of insulation materials and exterior doors, windows, and roofs designed to help reduce your home's heat loss or gain (installation costs are not covered). The credit applies to improvements made to existing homes in 2009 and 2010.

Here are a few of those improvements, as well as general tips, that can help make you home more energy efficient:

HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING

Heating and air conditioning uses the largest chunk of your home energy dollar. Keep it running "lean and mean."

- HVAC systems should be checked to verify they are moving the correct amount of air. An HVAC technician can tell you if it is.
- Heat pump and air conditioning systems should be checked annually to verify they are properly charged, strictly in accordance with manufacturers' guidelines.
- Inside and outside coils should be kept clean and free of debris.
- Gas furnaces should be tuned for maximum combustion efficiency.
- Return filters should be changed monthly.
- Have a HVAC technician check carefully for duct leaks. Leaks that are found should be sealed with fiberglass mesh and mastic sealant.

WINDOWS

A considerable amount of heat transfers through windows. If you have single-pane windows, consider doing the following:

- Tighten and weather-strip your old windows and then add storm windows.
- Compare the above cost with replacing your old single-glazed windows with new double-glazed windows.
- In colder climates "low-e" coatings on glass can help reduce heat loss through windows.

- In hot climates, consider adding solar screening to west-facing windows that catch a lot of heating late in the day. Solar screening is sold at many home improvement stores.

AIR INFILTRATION

Air that transfers in and out of homes through cracks, crevices and holes can increase energy consumption. Here are some helpful tips to avoid air infiltration:

- Seal around pipe penetration coming through walls.
- During hot and cold weather, ensure windows are closed tightly and locked.
- Ensure weather-stripping around doors and windows is tight.
- When your fireplace is not operating, its flue should be closed tightly, with a sign hanging from the flue handle warning it is closed.
- Check the ceiling behind the cornice of built-in bookshelves for holes cut during construction.
- Drop-down, disappearing stairways should fit tightly into the ceiling and be carefully weather-stripped.
- Whole-house attic fans should be sealed tightly during the winter.
- Make sure your outside dryer vent door closes when the dryer is not in use. This requires cleaning away lint accumulation periodically.

INSULATION

Use home remodeling projects as a convenient means to add more insulation to existing cavities. Different insulation requires different installation techniques—follow what is recommended by the manufacturer.

- If you have R-19 or less insulation in your attic, consider bringing it up to R-38 in moderate climates, R-49 in cold climates.
- In cold climates, if you have R-11 or less floor insulation, consider bringing it up to R-25.
- Blown in wet cellulose or high-density foam insulation can stop infiltration better than fiberglass.
- Proper installation of insulation should prevent moisture in your walls.
- Perimeter insulation around crawl-spaces, basements, and ceiling insulation are the most important places to have adequate insulation.
- During construction, seal all openings, plates and walls with foam or caulk.
- Insulate and seal ducts in attics, crawl spaces, garages, and other unheated areas.

SELECTING A CONTRACTOR

When selecting a contractor, keep in mind that the cheapest price is not always the best value. Here are some questions to ask when deciding who to use:

- How long have you been in business?
- Can you provide proof that you are state-licensed and carry workers' compensation insurance?
- Can you provide the names of neighbors who have used your services?
- Are you a member of the Better Business Bureau?