

Columnists

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Before you get too comfortable, insulate, and be cozy all winter

Though it may not be trendy or visible, insulation isn't as boring and mundane as you might think.

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Insulation will never get mistaken for a sexy green product. Weatherizing your home will never be as cool as driving an electric car or using a snazzy, reusable water bottle.

But even though it may not be trendy or visible, insulation isn't as boring and mundane as you might think. Home insulation and weatherization options now include eco-spiffy products such as radiant-barrier insulation, window inserts, insulating window blinds and insulation made from green materials.

Q: Those sound great, but I still never get around to actually doing any home-weatherizing projects. What's my problem?

A: Many of us share your problem. We should insulate, but we procrastinate. Having more and better product choices helps, but we also need additional incentives to take action.

First let's be clear about the overall goal. During Seattle's nine chilly months, you want heat to stay inside the home where it belongs. You can accomplish that by adding insulation to walls and attics and sealing up air leaks everywhere.

Get motivated by visualizing what you'll do with your extra money, since insulating and weatherizing can save up to 20 percent on heating costs. Think about how much more comfortable your home will be if you eliminate drafts. And if you've always wanted to do more on a personal level to reduce global warming, this is your chance.

Q: Should a contractor do this work?

A: For a major insulating or weatherizing project, it's often best to use a contractor if you can afford it. First, have a professional home-energy audit done to determine your exact needs. To find a trained, certified contractor or energy auditor, visit the nonprofit HomePerformanceWashington.org.

Low-income homeowners and renters may qualify for financial assistance for weatherization. Puget Sound Energy provides contact information for these programs in Western Washington at seati.ms/Uk81do.

But just because you don't hire a contractor or energy auditor doesn't mean you should do nothing. Even the smallest do-it-yourself weatherization project, such as installing foam gaskets behind light switches, can make a difference and motivate you for more ambitious projects. Do

something this fall!

Q: OK, I'm fired up. What are some of the latest green products for insulation?

A: Any insulation is a green product because of the job it does, but an increasing number of products kick it up a notch because they're made from recycled materials. Look for fiberglass insulation made from recycled glass bottles, cotton insulation made from recycled jeans and other textiles, or radiant-barrier insulation made from recycled aluminum and glass. Eco-retailer Green Depot in South Seattle has a good selection of recycled-content insulation.

Radiant-barrier insulation usually consists of a layer of fiberglass or air sandwiched thinly between layers of aluminum foil. Although it works especially well in a hot climate where air conditioning is used extensively, radiant-barrier insulation can also be effective in our region, in an attic or to wrap ductwork.

Technical aspects of insulation can be tricky, so invest a little time online or talk to experts to select appropriate products.

Q: Heat just pours out of my windows in the winter. What do I do about that?

A: Consider thermal window inserts, such as Portland-based Indow Windows (indowwindows.com). These clear plastic inserts simulate double-paned windows at a much lower cost.

Insulating blinds and thermal curtains are excellent choices for apartments, with many styles now available. By ingeniously adding layers of material and air, insulating blinds block up to 60 percent of heat from escaping through a window.

Q: What about all the traditional weatherization products?

A: Most of those also do a great job. As an example, let's give a shout-out to rope caulk and "caulk saver" (a plastic strip to fill a gap, so you use less caulk). These products cost just a few bucks, are easy to use, and can quickly close those expensive little gaps around windows or doors.

So, take action now for a cozier home this winter. Don't hesitate. Insulate. Don't agonize. Weatherize.

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