

METRO PULSE

Welcome Back: Save cash by winterizing

A few things you can do to be more energy efficient

By Mark Collins

Sunday, January 11, 2009

As the frosty weather continues to chill the bones when you're out and about, there are steps you can take to make your house or apartment toastier during the next few months.

Winterizing your home -- making it more energy efficient, and safer -- can be easier than you think.

"Air leakage is probably the biggest waste," said J.C. Martel, manager for the Center for ReSource Conservation's energy audit program in Boulder.

The most significant air leakage usually happens around the edges of a home's windows. But if you detect a slight breeze even when your windows are tightly shut, that doesn't mean you need new windows, Martel said. Usually, sealing around the edges of a window, where its frame meets the drywall and sill, does the trick.

Not sure if your windows are leaking air or are airtight? Light, then blow out, a match, and slowly move the smoking stick around the edge of your window. If you see a sudden change in the smoke's direction, you've got a leak.

Martel suggested using clear, silicone-based caulk to seal edges of your windows.

While a home with little or no air leakage is ideal in Colorado's winter climate, it's important that the air that remains in your home is safe. That's especially true during winter months in

a cold climate when windows are locked tight, and there's little air movement through your home.

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is odorless and colorless and highly toxic, and can enter your home via faulty appliances or water-heater systems. It produces flu-like symptoms (but no fever) in people who are exposed to it.

According to the Center for Disease Control, roughly 500 people die in the United States each year from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning.

A family of four from Denver died in Aspen over Thanksgiving due to carbon monoxide poisoning in the home where they were staying. Officials reported the carbon monoxide leaked from the home's hot water and snow-melting system.

Carbon monoxide detectors are easy to use, said Barry Hight, president of McGuckin Hardware in Boulder. CO detectors reveal the level of carbon monoxide per million parts of what's in the air. CO detectors sell for \$24-\$60 at McGuckin.

Shutting off water

Hight also suggested knowing where your home's main water shutoff valve is located. Winter's fluctuating temperatures can cause water pipes to contract and expand to the point where small leaks form.

If you hear water moving somewhere in your pipes even when your faucets are turned off, chances are there's a leak.

If you're renting a home, "make sure you let the landlord know of leaks pretty quickly," Hight said. "That way, they can solve the problem before a lot of water damage. But, probably, the most important thing in cold weather is to know where the main water shutoff is.

"If the water gets running in a situation where it gets cold and then it warms back up, if you hear running water in the house and you can't see where it is, it's important you get it shut off (at the main shutoff valve)."

Water pipes situated in the walls on the exterior of a home are most susceptible to freezing and springing a leak, Hight said. If you have water pipes in an exterior wall, it's good to keep the water running slightly, or at a slow drip, when the temperatures dip below freezing.

If saving a little money on your utility bill during the winter is a goal, consider keeping your thermostat at 68 degrees, and turning your hot water heater temperature gauge to 120 degrees.

And while they're a little more expensive to purchase, studies show compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) are more energy efficient than traditional incandescent bulbs and can save you money in the long run.

Consider replacing your incandescent light bulbs with CFLs.



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