

Two ways to cut winter fuel bills

Now that the trick-or-treaters have come and gone, most of the leaves have been raked and the gutters cleaned. It is time to turn your attention to winterizing the interior of your house.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do to prepare for the blustery weather that lies ahead is to take steps now to improve your home's energy efficiency. By performing a few simple tasks, you can easily lower your fuel bills significantly and keep your family warmer, regardless of how cold it is outside.

The first job that should be performed is to seal drafts to prevent the flow of cold air into the house and warm air from escaping. According to Doug Fritsch, 84 Lumber's home improvement expert, every door and window should be air tight, and other potential trouble spots should be examined as well.

"Of all the weather protection products for sale, caulking and weather stripping often cost less and works better than most others," said Fritsch. "Caulking should also be applied in several other areas that many people do not consider such as around the exterior of water faucets, dryer vents and where phone cable wires and plumbing enter the house."

When examining sources of drafts, consider the following list of places to caulk:

- Around windows and doors;
- Around basement sashes;
- In splits between joints in wood siding;
- Cracks between door thresholds and stoops;
- Between dissimilar materials such as wood and masonry, steel and masonry and wood and metal;
- Along the bottom of siding where it meets the foundation of a house;
- At dormers and roof flashing;
- Around cable vents and roof vents;
- At power, phone line and plumbing entrances;
- Around water faucets and dryer vents;
- Around fixed storm windows.

To caulk, you will need two products: a metal caulking gun shell and the caulking itself, which comes in a variety of types and prices. "I recommend a latex caulk with silicone because it is durable, easy to apply, easy to clean up and bonds well to most surfaces," says Fritsch. "100% silicone caulk is also very good although it costs a little more." Most 100% silicone caulk lasts for 20 years or more.

Fritsch said, "It is important to read the label carefully and consult an 84 Lumber associate before buying, paying particular attention to the recommended uses, application temperature, resistance, and the life expectancy. It is also important to apply the caulk correctly. A good general rule of thumb is to apply a continuous bead about half as thick as the gap you are filling."

Weather stripping also can save you plenty in heating and cooling bills. Consider this, a little crack around the exterior door of an average home (about 1/4 inch or so) if compounded, would be equivalent to a six inch square cut through the face of the door. The heating, cooling loss, gain would be horrendous over a year's time.

An easy way to test for air leaks around doors and windows is by placing a dollar bill between the window sash and sill or the door and the door frame. Close the window or door and try to pull out the dollar. If it comes out easily, you need to consider adding weather stripping.

Look for these places where weather stripping protection can make a difference:

- Around windows and exterior doors;
- Around attic door panel or drop down stairs;
- Doors to basements, garages and crawl spaces;
- Around storm doors;
- Along the bottom of garage doors.

Most often, weather stripping is nailed, screwed or glued directly to doors and windows. However, most sponge rubber door and window weather stripping has an adhesive backing, making application that's much easier. Fritsch says, "A great product to use on doors and windows is Touch 'n Foam. It is very important to use Minimal Expansion foam to prevent sealing doors and windows shut. For larger areas like pipes and exterior holes you may use the original Touch 'n Foam product."

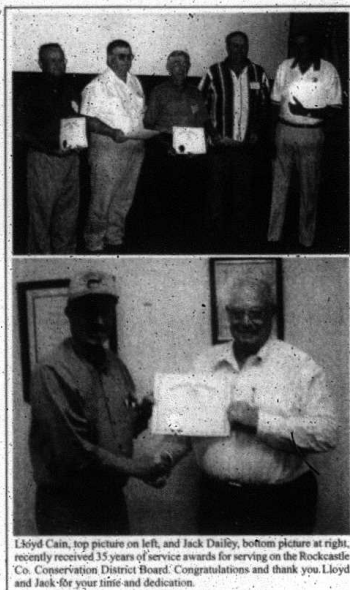
It is also important to eliminate doorway drafts by installing a door sweep on the bottom of exterior doors, as well as doors that lead to basements and garages.

In addition to these cost effective methods of trimming your fuel bills, it is important to have adequate insulation in your attic or crawl space. "Having an uninsulated or under-insulated attic can be one of the greatest sources of heat loss," said Fritsch. "We recommend that your attic has at least 12-16 inches of insulation, depending on the climate in which you live. If your house is built over a crawl space, you should have at least 6" of insulation between your floor joists."

Other winterizing suggestions:

- Replace furnace filters;
- Have your fireplace chimney cleaned and inspected;
- Install carbon monoxide detectors;
- Insulate exposed water pipes.

By performing these simple tasks, you can significantly reduce your winter fuel bills and keep your family cozy and warm throughout the season.



Lloyd Cain, top picture on left, and Jack Dailey, bottom picture at right, recently received 35 years of service awards for serving on the Rockcastle Co. Conservation District Board. Congratulations and thank you Lloyd and Jack for your time and dedication.

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No Paper Next Week

Due to the Christmas holiday, the **Mt. Vernon Signal** will not publish next week. Our next issue will be January 2, 2003. The **Signal** office will be closed December 23-27, 2002 and will reopen December 30th.

Plan ahead for Old Man Winter

During cold-temperatures and wintry weather, it's a good idea to plan ahead for a possible power outage just in case Old Man Winter takes down the electric lines.

Here are a few good ideas to be prepared for a winter power outage:

- Don't open your refrigerator or freezer except when it's absolutely necessary. A closed refrigerator will keep food cold for up to 12 hours, and a well-filled freezer will preserve food for two or three days.
- Open faucets slightly to they drip. This will prevent your pipes from freezing if there's no heat.
- If you have a kerosene heater, make sure your room is well-ventilated.

Fossil fuel-burning space heaters can cause fumes to build up.

Never use a charcoal grill for heat; the fumes are harmful.

Turn off or unplug all appliances so they don't trigger an electrical overload when the power comes back on. Leave one light switch 'on, though, so you'll know when power is restored.

Keep a battery-powered radio - with fresh batteries - on hand so you can hear announcements about the weather.

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