

Memo to: Mary Beth Smetzer  
News Miner

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Tanana District Extension Home Economist

I had fuel oil delivered last week. The deliveryman brought the bill to the door and requested we didn't open it until he left. It caused a little laughter at our house, but I can imagine how often he has been chewed on because of the recent increase in fuel oil costs. Today I thought we could talk about what we can do to reduce our fuel consumption without spending a mint.

Air leaks are a major problem. You can reduce your energy consumption by 10% by tightening up your house. Of course, how much that decrease depends on how leaky your house is. If you had a hole in your wall that was 4 inches square, you'd fill it immediately. However, if you have a 1/8 inch crack around a standard 3 by 5 window you have the same amount of air infiltration. Caulk around the windows and doors on your house. There are a wide variety of caulks available, check your local store. But a tube of caulk and a caulking gun sells for less than \$30. That's enough caulk to do nearly anyone's house and the caulking gun will be around to use for years.

Check the weather stripping on windows and doors. Run your hand around the door and see where the air is coming in. Weather stripping is available at hardware stores and lumber yards. My door jams have a little slot that the weather stripping slips into, so I just took an old piece of weather strip to the store for a match. There is always foam with glue on the back or a screw in weather strip as well. Regardless of what type of door you have, there is a weather stripping to fill that space. I tightened the weather strips around my door for about \$8 per door.

Check the bottom of the door as well. You may need a new sweep (the part that closes against the threshold) on the door. Sweeps are available to fit all types of doors. Mine pops onto the bottom of the door, but there are others that slip over the bottom of the door and screw to the door itself.

Another place for air infiltration is around wall outlets and switch plates on exterior walls. Install rubber gaskets behind outlet and switch plates on exterior walls. The only tool needed is a screwdriver. Unscrew the plate, pop in the gasket, and you are well insulated for a cost of less than a dollar per switch plate or outlet.

Windows are a huge draw on our energy dollars. An insulated window can lose 10 to 20 times as much heat as the same area of a well insulated wall. If you have windows that are less energy efficient, cover them up. Use curtains or drapes to cover the window, which adds another layer of protection between you and the winter. This is one place that cornice boards do a particularly good job. This is a box that fits over the top of the window and is covered with fabric. As hot air rises, it flows down the wall, cooling

rapidly as it comes in contact with the cold windows. A cornice board keeps the air away from the window so it doesn't cool off so fast.

If you still want to look out the window, consider using plastic on the windows. Window film is now available that you can put in place over the window, then use a hair dryer to shrink it to fit. It's a lot better than that old plastic that we used to put on the outside of windows and is a lot easier to see through. You can cover a standard size window for \$3 and reduce the costs of that cold air streaming in.

If you are interested in a thorough energy check, call Golden Valley Electric for one of their energy audits. It costs \$40 and will save you far more in future electric bills.

Make sure that you tighten up your house to reduce your energy costs this winter.