

Warming trend

Winterizing your home keeps energy costs down

By Mark Collins
Camera Theater Critic

November was dry and unseasonably warm along the Front Range. But cold weather is surely on its way.

If you haven't done so already, it's not too late to take some simple steps to winterize your home to make it more energy efficient.

The most common waste of energy within a home is from air leakage around the interior of a home's windows, according to J.C. Martel, manager for the Center for ReSource Conservation's Residential Energy Audit Program (REAP) in Boulder.

"Sometimes people think they need to replace their windows when all they really need to do is seal around their windows," she said.

Attic entrances and bypasses, chimney chases, plumbing vent chases, crawl spaces and basements are other areas that can be prone to air leakage. So are doorways, electrical outlets and switch plates, gaps along the baseboards or flooring.

Other ways to winterize your home include making sure your home's insulation is substantial, checking for possible leaks in your ductwork and inspecting your furnace and wa-

ter heater to make sure they're in top form.

Thanks to subsidies from Boulder County and area city governments, the CRC conducts energy audits at a reduced rate. The audit costs from \$100 to \$250, depending on the size of your home.

Martel said a REAP audit, which includes analysis of your utility bill, typically takes from two to three hours. It also includes inspection of the homeowner's furnace and water heater, windows and appliances. The auditor analyzes the home's distribution of heat, as well.

If one area of your home is colder than another in the winter, then it's probably not getting enough heat.

"There might be air leakage in the ductwork," Martel said.

One of the most important aspects of a home-energy audit, she said, is the blower-door test. A blower-door test involves an auditor temporarily installing a large fan into the doorway of an outer door. The fan simulates 20-mile-per-hour winds, and sucks the air from inside outward, which enables the auditor to discover any air leaks in the home.

"If it's a really leaky house, the fan is going to have to run harder to get the house up to the particular pressure we're



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Courtesy photo

Charlie Richardson, an energy auditor with Homeworx, operates a blower door test, a tool to determine air leakage within a home.

testing at," said Charlie Richardson, a home-energy auditor with HomeWorx. "If it's a really tight house, it will pressurize very quickly."

After the energy inspection, a report is e-mailed to the homeowner.

"After the audit, if anyone needs insulation we have insulation rebates available," Martel said. "We also have solar-thermal rebates available."

The 2008 Insulate Colorado Program offers rebates of up to \$300 for attic and wall insulation and for air-sealing materials. According to the CRC, 60 percent of homes in the United States are under-insulated or uninsulated. Homes built prior to 1980 are especially more likely to fall into one of those two categories.

Homeowners can also take advantage of the sun's natural warming power by opening window coverings on windows with direct sunlight during sunny winter days, and by closing window coverings in rooms that don't feature direct sunlight.

As well as winterizing your home for the cold months, Martel suggests two actions to conserve energy and cut down energy costs.

"The most cost-effective things a person can do is switch all your light bulbs to CFLs (compact fluorescent light bulbs) and buy a programmable thermostat and just turn it back a couple degrees," she said. "Test yourself — see how far back you can set it and still be comfortable."

To find out more about REAP, about how to winterize your home, and other energy-conversation tips, visit the Center for ReSource Conversation's Web site at www.conserva-tioncenter.org.