

Simple DIY Steps to Keep Those Icy Blasts Out of Your Living Spaces

With cold winds whistling around your home and chivvying at your doors and windows, you quickly notice air – and energy - leaks in your home in winter. Finding them, however, may be a challenge.

An energy audit, of course, will reveal not only obvious air leaks but also harder-to-find problems such as thin or nonexistent insulation, cracked foundations, faulty ductwork, even gas leaks. You can schedule an audit easily through your power company or through LEED-certified specialists.

But if you're looking for an immediate fix to stop icy gusts, try these steps:

Smoke Out the Draft

You can easily find drafts using a lighted candle or incense stick, or a single-ply tissue taped over a dowel or ruler. Hold this in the area where you feel the draft, moving it slowly from one point to the next and stopping every six inches or so. You can identify the location of the draft by noticing whether, and where, the flame, smoke or tissue flutter in a certain direction.

Weather-stripping doors and caulking windows are obvious first steps to eliminating drafts...and they are just the beginning. Be sure to check near light switches and electrical outlets, especially those on outside-facing walls. If you find a draft, take off the faceplate and insert a gasket or soy-based insulating foam. Exhaust fans in your kitchen and bathroom can be another culprit: check to be sure that the damper fits snugly. If you see that air is coming through, you may need to have the damper or roof cap checked (or a cap installed if none is present).

Catch the Thermals

We all know that heat rises...and if you're not careful, it can rise from floor to floor, and potentially out through your roof or chimney. How can you stop this?

Take your candle, incense or tissue and check any place where wires, pipes or ductwork go through your floors or ceilings. Kitchen and bathroom cabinets and utility closets are prime suspects, as are the areas around phone jacks, cable hookups, and outdoor plumbing connections. When you find a leak, close it up with caulk, insulation, insulating foam, or a gasket.

If you can get into your attic, look for dirty insulation around the perimeter or near joists. This indicates that air and indoor pollutants are flowing up through the floor and getting trapped in the fibers of the insulation. Find the leak and close it up.

You can lose a tremendous amount of heat if you have an open fireplace. Even if you keep the damper closed when no fire is lit, air can still get past. Use an inflatable chimney balloon to block heat from escaping and cold air from descending.

These simple steps will reduce the major air/energy leaks in your home; however, they're just the beginning. Again, to eliminate your hidden energy losses, your best long-range solution is an energy audit.