



Times-News

Energy Black Holes: How Do You Know You Have A Problem?

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ECO NOTES



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Although the predominant color in our landscape this season has been white (up until recently) most of us have energy bills showing a vibrant shade of red. Heating costs have been through the roof given our below “normal” temperatures this winter, focusing a glaring spotlight on energy black holes in our homes.

In energy efficiency as in all things, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The steps that we take in our homes to seal leaks, insulate against cold or hot weather, remediate mold and radon issues, and landscape in a way that helps to conserve energy and water, can all make a difference in saving money while lowering our energy footprint -- a twice green solution.

There are many misconceptions about the cost and time commitment it takes to turn a brown home into a green one. Energy efficiency often conjures up images of huge expenses for major projects that never pay themselves off. But in actuality, taking some small steps, from sealing leaky ducts to insulating the attic and crawlspace can cost very little and have an immediate impact on your bills.

“Ok, I’m in,” you say, “but where do I begin?” The first step is usually scheduling an energy audit. We have several professional auditors who can inspect your home and help find the “energy skeletons” in your closet. ECO members all receive a substantial discount by using these auditors and once the inspection is completed, you decide what or how much you want to do. Often many of the energy saving steps are things that you can be done on your own. And sometimes, our energy audits save lives, literally.

Take me, for instance. I had taken some small steps in my home and thought I had a pretty tight house, yet our family room seemed to be always chilly and we had drafts in other places. It turns out my attic had been insulated based on standards set in the 1970s. We also discovered that the “all house fan” was blowing fiber glass from the attic insulation into our bedroom vents. Worst of all, a previous owner had hooked the clothes dryer up so it vented into the drop ceiling in the basement; a fire hazard waiting to happen.

My energy inspection had 22 items on it, but realistically, as an employee of a nonprofit, I would need to prioritize my list and do it over time. Many things cost little and I could do on my own, bigger things might have to wait until I am in a better position to handle it. But my family room is now toasty with a minimum of cost, my house will not burn down due to a jungle of dust bunnies in my drop ceiling and my energy costs have dropped substantially even though we’ve had colder days this winter than in years.

What have other inspections turned up? Some homeowners had huge holes in their attics, others had attics without any insulation at all, and some folks’ furnaces were wafting flue gases into the rest of the house. In many cases, home energy problems are not so extreme. Medical checkups help evaluate how healthy we are and identify any health issues requiring attention. Similarly, home checkups can prolong the life of your home as well as the people in it.

ECO is hosting a major Earth Day festival on April 24th at the large open field at Blue Ridge Community College which, in addition to an outdoor solar stage hosting local music, an electric car “race”, a greenway hike, and a green Olympics, will host workshops on energy efficiency and an opportunity to meet with green energy vendors about what steps you can take to un-tether yourself to your electric/gas/oil bill. But don’t wait, contact ECO today at 692-0385 or log onto our website www.eco-wnc.org for more energy savings tips.

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