

Why wait till winter to weatherproof your home?

Everyone says that spring is the perfect time to improve your home's energy efficiency. You make sure that winter will be more comfortable, and let's hope more affordable energy-wise. That is sensible, but did you know that weatherproofing a home makes it more comfortable and efficient during the warm weather too?

How would you like to look forward to a summer where your air conditioning bills are lower, you keep humidity under control and you no longer have an infestation of ants, ladybugs and cluster flies? All of this is possible if you think of energy and comfort as being about more than heating and air conditioning. What you need to do, says Steve Tratt, National Sales Manager for Zerodraft, is to protect your indoor space properly from the outdoor environment.

Let's start by taking a look at how your home works as a system to keep you comfortable before suggesting some simple weatherproofing measures. Heating and air conditioning make our homes warmer in winter and cooler in summer, but they work much more easily and efficiently in a home that's weatherproofed or where air leakage is properly controlled.

A house is made up of different elements that interact with each other to make a perfect indoor environment possible. These are the heating and cooling system, the building shell (walls, roof, floor, doors and windows) and finally the occupants themselves – that's you. Why you? Because the more of you there are in a space, the more heat and humidity you generate. The way these elements affect each other is known in Zerodraft's world as 'the house as a system.'

Think both efficiency and comfort

We all know what efficiency means...lower energy bills. But summer comfort means different things to different people. It may be as simple as the air temperature you want, the airflow you want or the right humidity level. It can also be freedom from pests, garage exhaust fumes and other irritants such as noise, and mould.

The quickest way to improve both efficiency and comfort is to limit the amount of air travelling in and out and around your home. Check the weatherstripping around the windows and doors and replace if necessary. Run a bead of sealant under the windowsills and around the frame. Put gaskets behind electrical outlets. Squirt foam behind the baseboards.

A word about insulation. What keeps the heat in during the winter, keeps the heat out during the summer. So you'll also want to check insulation in your basement, if you have one, and on the floor of your attic. Remember, insulation by itself will not stop drafts, especially if it's glass fibre. If you've got air conditioning ducts in the attic, you'll need to insulate them for sure.

Moisture in the attic

Moisture in the attic is a year-round problem and can be serious. It arrives from two directions: from the inside of the house as warm air rises and condenses on the underside of the deck and from the outside as water leakage through failed shingles. In addition to water damage, any moisture in the attic can be the start of a serious mould and roof deterioration problem.

The answer is to make the attic a completely separate space from the rest of the house. Warmth and warm air containing moisture in the living space must not rise into the non-conditioned space in the attic. Insulation by itself is not enough. You also need to seal the many air leakage pathways between the two spaces. These include access hatches, plumbing stacks, recessed light fixtures, ducts, electrical wiring, dropped ceilings and bulkheads, exhaust fans, top plates and many other penetrations between the two spaces.

Sometimes ventilation is seen as a cure-all for attic moisture problems. Ventilation is necessary to dry the attic in spring, but it cannot be relied upon as the sole means of controlling attic moisture.

Insect pests and bad smells

Cluster flies are a common problem in Southern Ontario. Pesticides and swatters are not the answer. Denying entry is much better. These pests come in through the attic vents and then down through the many penetrations into the house. They also get in through the sill plate at the top of the basement. Sealing both the attic floor and the sill and header space in the basement usually removes this irritation. In older houses, especially where there are wood sliders, you may need to replace the window weatherstripping

Garages are for cars and car exhaust is something no one wants inside their home. Unfortunately, if the walls between the garage and the interior are not sealed, unpleasant and even dangerous fumes can enter the living space. Various caulking materials, foam and gaskets can be used to isolate the garage. If there is a door from the house to the garage you should have it professionally weatherstripped.

Enjoy your summer!

To find an air-sealing contractor in your area, visit www.zerodraft.com. If you like to do-it-yourself, try your local big box or hardware store for materials and some good advice.