EMPIRE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

Echoes of the Empire

NOVEMBER 2021

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SEEING THE **LIGHT**

BY ANDY CARTER MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

ANDY CARTER

Fall brings cooler temperatures that prompt us to don our favorite jackets, scarves and gloves to ward off the chilly air. The extra layers slow the rate at which your body loses heat. Homes don't have jackets, but they do have an exterior shell, or envelope, that, when properly built and maintained, will also help reduce the loss of heat during cold weather and will save you money on your energy bill.

Your home's envelope consists of its roof, outer walls, windows, doors and other openings. A well-sealed envelope, coupled with the right amount of insulation, can reduce your energy use and, in turn, your utility bills. According to EnergyStar.gov, a whopping nine out of 10 homes in the United States do not have enough insulation. Homeowners can save an average of 15% on heating and cooling costs (or an average of 11% on total energy costs) by air-sealing their homes and adding insulation in attics, floors, crawl spaces and basements.

The first step to determine if your home's envelope is in good shape is to take the time to inspect it. You can perform your own inspection or you can hire a certified energy auditor who will not only evaluate your home's envelope, but will also review all the energy-consuming systems in your home and make recommendations on how to improve them. EEA offers a rebate that will pay for 50% of the audit's cost up to $500 for an energy audit performed by a certified auditor. More details can be found at eea.coop in the "Programs to Help You Save Energy" section.

If you decide to perform your own building envelope inspection, the two things you should be concerned with are air leaks and the type and amount of insulation that are present. Before you repair or install more insulation, you need to identify and repair any air leaks that exist between the conditioned part of your home and the unconditioned space. Unconditioned space obviously includes the outdoors, but it also may include an attached garage or your attic.

Potential problem areas for air leaks include doors, windows, sill plates (the bottom piece of wall structure where wall studs are attached), top plates (supportive beams in the ceiling), crawl spaces, outdoor faucets, dryer vents, stove vent fans, roof eaves and overhangs, plumbing vent stacks, recessed lighting, attic hatches and air duct registers. Watch for light shining in through gaps and cracks. If you have a partner, you can do the inspection when it's dark and have your partner shine a flashlight in potential problem areas to make it easier to identify air leaks. If you can see light, you have an air leak.

Any areas where air leaks are found need to be repaired. Easier projects like replacing cracked window caulking or a worn door sweep can be handled by most homeowners, but some air leaks in crawl spaces and attics may best be left to a professional.

The next step is to evaluate your insulation. You will need to know the type of insulation in your home, its R-value (rate of thermal resistance) and its thickness or depth in inches.

IN THE ATTIC

- A general rule of thumb when inspecting the attic insulation is if the insulation is level with or below the attic

floor joists, you probably need to add more insulation.

- If you cannot see any of the floor joists because the insulation is well above them, you probably have enough and adding more insulation may not be cost effective.
- Insulation should be evenly distributed with no low spots; be sure to check throughout the attic to determine if there are any thin spots. Pay particular attention to where the roof meets the exterior walls.
- Make sure the insulation in your attic has the appropriate R-value for where you live. If it is paper-backed batting, check the value printed on the backing. If you cannot find the value, measure the depth of the insulation in inches. Multiply the depth by the following insulation type: 3.2 for fiberglass batting; for the loose fiber category, multiply by 2.5 for loose fiberglass, 2.8 for rock wool and 3.7 for cellulose. Then check EnergyStar.gov's recommended R-values. If your calculated value is less than the recommended levels for your region, then you should consider adding more insulation to your attic.

BEHIND THE WALLS

- Turn off the power to the outlet before beginning this check. Once power is turned off, use a voltmeter or voltage tester to confirm that there is no power at the socket before beginning work.
- Remove the outlet cover and shine a flashlight into the crack around the outlet box. You should be able to see if there is insulation in the wall and possibly how thick it is.
- Pull out a small amount of insulation if needed to help determine the type of insulation.
- Check outlets on all floors, as well as old and new parts of your home. Just because you find insulation in one wall does not mean that it is uniform throughout your home.

Be sure to note your findings as you go so you have a record of the different types and depths of insulation around your home to assist you in determining if more insulation is needed. If you think you need more insulation, contact a professional insulation contractor to confirm your assessment and determine if it is cost effective to add more. Ensuring your home has no air leaks and adequate insulation will not only save on your energy bills, but it will also make your home more comfortable all year round. For more information on energy efficiency and electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org and Energy.gov.

November 2021

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

One of the best ways you can save energy and stay comfortable this winter is to caulk and weather-strip areas that typically need sealing. Start by sealing around windows and doors. Seal plumbing, ducting and areas where electrical wiring comes through walls, floors and ceilings for additional energy savings.

Source: energy.gov

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Co-op Photo Contest Winner November 2021 — *Aspens by Sarah Jones*

Monthly **Calendar**

November 11
Veterans Day

November 12
EEA's board meeting begins at 8:30 a.m. at its headquarters in Cortez. The agenda is posted 10 days in advance of the meeting at eea.coop. Members are reminded that public comment is heard at the beginning of the meeting. Meeting restrictions due to health concerns may require the meeting to be held remotely.

November 25 & 26
EEA offices closed in observance of Thanksgiving.

Do you need help?

If you have fallen behind on your home energy bills, help is available today. Please apply to the Colorado State LEAP Program or to the Energy Outreach Colorado Bill Payment Assistance Program.

Learn more at **www.energyoutreach.org/programs** or call **1-866-432-8435**.

MY CO-OP **EMPLOYEES**

Levi Bates, energy management advisor

EEA hired Levi Bates as its new energy management advisor. Levi grew up on a farm and ranch in the Cortez area and graduated from Montezuma-Cortez High School. Following graduation, he attended the Colorado School of Mines where he earned a degree in mining engineering. After working for nine years as an engineer and foreman in the metal mining industry, Levi has returned to Cortez to raise a family and start a new career with EEA.

Levi is looking forward to the challenge of problem solving as well as interacting with you as he works to become your energy expert. Please join us in welcoming Levi and his family back to Cortez.

Before you dust off your space heater and plug it in, consider that most home heating fire deaths (86%) involve space heaters, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). In fact, heating equipment is the second-leading cause of U.S. home fires (cooking is the leading cause).

More than half of the heating-related home fires start when flammable items are too close to the heat source, according to the NFPA. Those items include upholstered furniture, clothing, a mattress or bedding.

Nearly half of all home heating fires occur in December, January and February.

Here are some space heater safety tips:

- Only use them as the manufacturer recommends
- Do not leave them unattended
- Give them space: remove any flammable items within 3 feet
- Plug them directly into outlets; don't use an extension cord
- Consider using a dedicated circuit to avoid overload
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters at all times
- Turn them off before you leave the room or go to sleep

Learn more at: SafeElectricity.org®