Fall Fix-up Days



THE CHESTERVILLE
RECORD

Wednesday, October 28, 1987

Accessories keep savings from going up in smoke

You bought a fireplace for its warm, cozy glow and for its energy savings.

Well, at least you'll have the warm, cozy glow.

A typical masonary fireplace requires three to ten times as much wood to produce the same amount of heat as an airtight, or controlled-draft, wood stove.

Fireplace gobble up as much fuel as you are willing to feed them but very little of the heat generated actually reaches the room.

A great deal of heat is drawn up the chimney when the fireplace is not operating.

Heat is also lost through the walls of the fireplace. Since fireplaces are typically built against exterior walls, this heat travels through the masonary to the outside.

On a seasonal basis, most fireplaces waste more heat than they produce. However, you can reduce this heat loss by using the fireplace more efficiently.

Several fireplace accessories on the market today can help the unit work more efficiently but none of them will convert a conventional fire-place into an efficient home-heating appliance.

The most common accessory is glass doors, which are available in a variety of sizes and styles and are usually attractively designed. Glass doors are standard on many prefabricated fireplaces.

You can restrict the amount of heat lost up the chimney by closing these doors when using the fireplace. However, which could cause a flue fire. It is a good idea to shut these doors when the fire is dying down or when the fire place is not in use.

Heat loss through the chimney can also be reduced by providing the fireplace with additional combustion air. One way is through fresh-air intake ducts, which bring outside air to the front of the fireplace.

The ducts should be constructed of noncumbustible material and be designed to prevent spark entry. They should also be equipped with a tight-fitting damper that can be closed when the fireplace is not in use.

Although glass doors are designed to resist breakage from temperature extremes or the impact of shifting or falling logs, accidents have been reported. To be on the safe side, build fires carefully and used a correct sized grate to keep logs in place.

Another popular fireplace accessory is the tube grate. Heat from the fire is drawn into this series of curved, hollow steel tubes and then channeled into the room. The true impact of this device on fireplace efficiency is debatable.

Fireplace inserts are wood-burning space heaters that fit into and effectively seal the fireplace opening. Correctly installed, these inserts can greatly improve the efficiency of the fireplace.

But there are risks involved.

Inserts block much of the excess air that typically flows through the fireplace's chimney. This means that flue gases become much hotter than usual, and the surfaces of the insert itself may become extremely hot. Combining these factors can result in overheating of the fireplace and chimney and even in chimney fires.

Reducing heat loss:
- Set the fireplace damper at the smallest possible opening that will not result in smoke backing up into the house.
- As the fire dies down, cover the fireplace with sheet metal or close the glass doors.
- Keep the damper and any doors or covers tightly shut when the fireplace is not in use.
- Ensure that the damper closes tightly. If it is warped, replace it. You can also install a less expensive chimney cap damper at the top of the flue. Note that this unit may freeze shut during the winter. Also, ensure that the damper is designed to fall open should the opening mechanism fail.

Ensure that the unit you purchase meets the Underwriters Laboratories of Canada standard for fireplace inserts. This standard also sets out requirements for safe installation.

Water heater's thirst for energy can be easily cooled off

Aside from space heating, water heating probably represents the biggest portion of your energy consumption.

The easiest method of reducing water-heating costs is to lower the temperature of the water. By turning the water heater thermostat down to about 49 degrees C, you will consume less energy while keeping the water hot enough for most needs. However, unless it has a booster, a dishwasher may require water at 60 degrees C.

Sensible use of hot water can also save you money. Wash only full loads of clothes and use warm or cold water whenever possible (always use cold water for the rinse cycle). Wait until the dishwasher is full before running it and use the energy saver cycle as often as possible. If you buy a new dishwasher, purchase a unit equipped with a built-in preheater that boosts the water temperature to the required 60 degrees C.

Flow-restrictors and aerators on faucets and showerheads are inexpensive and allow you to use much less water.

Leaky faucets waste more water than you might think: just one drop per second will waste enough water every water every month for 16 hot baths. And speaking of baths...showers usually use less water.

One of the easiest ways to reduce your water-heating costs is to pay attention to the amount of hot water you use in day-to-day activities. Don't use hot water if warm water will do the job. Similarly, don't automatically turn the warm water on full force if a lesser amount of warm water -- or better yet, cool water -- will be just as effective.

Insulation can also help reduce water-heating costs, especially if the water heater is located in a relatively cool area of the house. Check with your local utility for their recommendations.

Standby losses from water heaters (heat lost through the tank because of the temperature difference between the water inside the unit and the air surrounding it) can be reduced in several ways. Specially designed insulation kits that meet Canadian General Standards Board specifications are available at hardware stores for between $15 and $25. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully when installing these kits.

Alternatively, homeowners can make a water heater jacket using batt insulation with an attached aluminum foil vapour barrier. Wrap the heater with the insulation, leaving the vapour barrier on the outside. Trim overlapping or overhanging insulation, cut openings for the drain valve, thermostat, pilot light if the tank has one, pressure relief valve, and then seal the insulation with heavy duct tape at all the seams. Make sure the blanket is fastened in position.

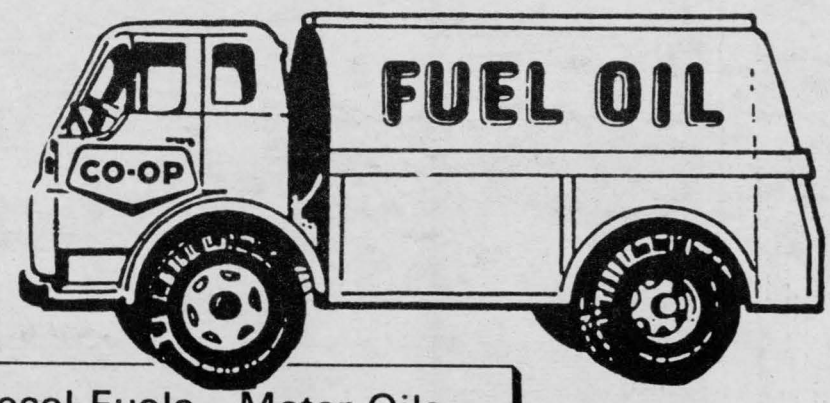
When you are insulating a natural gas, propane or oil-fired water heater, do not install insulation below the burner controls, the combustion air openings and vent connection, or on the top of the heater. The insulation should be no thicker than 75 mm and the thermomstat setting no higher than medium.

The thermostat setting on an electric water heater should be below 60 degrees C and the insulation should be no more than 51 mm thick. (Leaking water tanks should not be insulated). The insulation should extend over the top of the heater and openings should be cut for wiring connections, access doors and the rating plate. The pressure release valve and overflow pipe should remain outside the insulation.

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The bargain furnace sometimes costs more

The choice of a new furnace or boiler should not be made strictly on the basis of lowest installed cost alone. Spending a few dollars or even a few hundred dollars more on an efficient, quality unit will pay off with lower heating costs and fewer repairs in the long run.

The two key features a consumer should look for in a new heating unit are the efficiency of a furnace or boiler and its rated heating capacity. New furnaces or boilers with a flame retention or high-efficiency burner should have an efficiency of 80 per cent or better.

For the average size home, the rated heating capacity of the more efficient oil-fired furnaces ranges from 70,000 kJ per hour (75,000 Btu per hour) to 158,000 kJ per hour (150,000 Btu per hour; and beyond, and hot water boilers are available in capacities of 74,000 kJ per hour (70,000 Btu per hour) to 185,000 kJ per hour (175,000 Btu per hour) of heat output.

A detailed heat loss calculation must be performed to ensure that a properly sized unit is installed. This calculation measures the home's heat loss in kJ per hour (Btu per hour), taking into account wall, ceiling and glass areas, insulation levels, air changes and outside temperatures for the area.

Homeowners can easily make the mistake of purchasing too large or small a unit if a detailed heat loss calculation is not carried out.

The physical size of the unit is also worth considering. Selecting a new unit of roughly the same exterior dimensions as the old unit, provided efficiency or proper capacity is not sacrificed, can make installation easier.

Replacement hot water boilers are also rated by water volume as well as heating capacity. The water volume of the boiler is not as critical with new hot water baseboard systems.

But for old systems with case iron radiators, the new boiler must not only be efficient and of proper heating capacity, it must also have sufficient water volume.

When you are installing a new furnace or boiler ask the heating contractor about possible improvements to system controls and piping or ductwork.

Zoning the system, adding a circulator to a hot water system, or providing more cold air return registers to warm air sytems are some of the options worth considering.

But remember, just because a furnace or boiler is old doesn't mean it needs to be replaced. Older units properly maintained and upgraded can easily reach a 75 per cent efficiency level.

For more information on heating, please contact Enerinfo, Nova Scotia Department of Mines and Energy, P.O. Box 1087, Halifax, N.S., or telephone 1-424-5727, toll-free in Nova Scotia.

Latex caulking has seal of approval

Getting the right caulking products is important when draft-proofing a house. Although there are many types of caulking materials available, some are more appropriate than others for interior use.

The three most important qualities consumers look for in interior caulking are lack of color, so the original paint will show through, lack of odor while the caulking is curing and paintability if the area needs to be repainted.

Health and Welfare Canada suggests that acrylic latex caulking should be used for draftproofing inside the home. Other popular sealants may give off gas.

Many contractors suggest the use of acrylic latex, silicon or hybrid caulking, depending on how much the structure of the house moves, and how easy it is to air the room while working with sealants.

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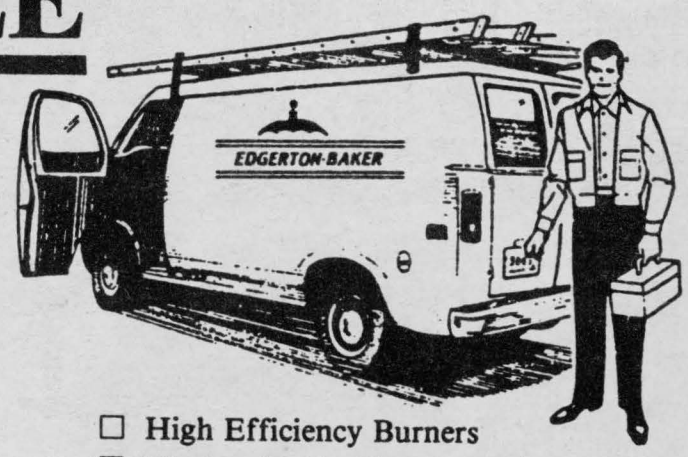
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Renovations can leave unprepared feeling run down

What do you do if your renovation falls weeks behind schedule?

What if the roofer you hired for a simple repair botches the job?

What if the plumber you hired doesn't up when he's supposed to?

These things can happen, no matter how careful you are in choosing contractors or tradespeople to work on your house. Things can go wrong.

How do you cope?

First, don't let feeling of anger or disappointment sway your judgement. Situations are rarely as simple as they first appear. If the problem is one of delay, for example, find out why. It could be that bad weather interfered with the work of that materials did not arrive on time.

If the cost of a project has suddenly escalated, is it because the contractor discovered a hidden structural flaw that couldn't be ignored? Be prepared to give the contractor's explanations a fair hearing; if no explanation is offered, ask for one.

If your relationship with the contractor or tradesperson is the problem, think over your own actions first. The customer isn't always right. For example, did you have unreasonable expectations?

Were you as clear as you might have been in your discussions of the job? Most problems can be settled in a satisfactory and even friendly manner if you're willing to review the issue calmly and clearly and if you're prepared to give a little ground in the interests of getting the job done.

It's worth repeating that careful planning is the best way to prevent problems. Follow the hiring procedure outlined in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing booklet 'Plans, Permits & Payments'.

This involves asking friends and neighbors for recommendations, interviewing the contractors, checking their references and getting three quotes before you decide.

Make sure your contract adequately protects you and ensures that your needs are met. It should describe the job as explicitly as possible and include start and completion dates.

You can also include a clause giving the right to end the agreements and seek another contractor under certain conditions (the quality doesn't meet the standards you agreed upon, work is far behind schedule).

Never settle for a verbal agreement.

There are a few other things to keep in mind too. Try to avoid creating unnecessary tensions in your relationships with contractors and tradespeople. Treat them as the professionals they are, not as servants.

Don't interfere with their concentration on the job. Supervision is one thing, pestering is something else.

Try to avoid creating unnecessary tension. Treat contractors as the professionals they are, not as servants.

Enough said. Let's assume you did everything right and you hired a contractor or carpenter (or roofer, plumber, whatever) who seemed to be just what you were looking for. But things aren't working out. You've reviewed your contract with the person in question, you've been clam and reasonable. And things still don't improve. What now?

You actually have several options; they get progressively more drastic. Begin by asking a knowledgeable friend or acquaintance -- someone who's not involved but understands the circumstances -- for a second opinion. Then you could try third-party mediation, perhaps asking the building inspector to take this role. Or get advice from a lawyer if you truly feel the situation is out of control.

The suggestions your friend or lawyer gives you may well be to formalize your complaint. You can send a registered letter to the contractor, explaining what you're dissatisfied with, what you want done to correct matters, and what you intend to do if this doesn't happen. You can threathen to withold payment or to hire another contractor to finish the job. You can also request the return of any downpayment you made.

If the problem is still unresolved, the next step might be to register your complaint with the Better Business Bureau, or with the official licensing agency, who will try to help you settle the conflict. They can, if necessary, arbitrate a settlement. You can also ask the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations to mediate, if you feel the contractor's business practices are deceptive or unfair. Get in touch with the local Consumer Services Branch for more information.

The courtroom is your last resort. But if the amount of money is less than $1,000 (or $3,000 in Toronto), you can go to Small Claims Court. The hearings are relatively informal and you won't need a lawyer.

Chances are you won't have to take such extreme measures. Ultimately, it's in the business interests of contractors and tradespeople to settle disputes quickly and amicable. After all, they stand to lose one of their most valuable business assets -- their reputations.

If you plan to hire a contractor or tradesperson to work on your home, you should first learn about your own rights and responsibilities. One good way is to read the series of booklets and factsheets produced by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. They're available in the Renovation Kit, which includes 'Plans, Permits & Payments' and 'Get Your House in Shape' (featuring a eomprehensive trades directory). The kit is free from H.C. Unit, 777 Bay Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto, Ont., M5G 2E5.



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Weatherstripping gives edge to energy conservation

Drafty doorways can account for as much as 20 per cent of a house's heat loss.

Figures like this underline the importance of insulating a home for the winter.

Weatherstripping can dramtically reduce heat loss through doors and windows. If improved comfort does not convince you of the benefits of this economical conservation measure, lower heating bills will.

Designed to be installed at any movable joint (caulking is the appropriate material to use on non-moving joints), weatherstripping is most commonly used on doors, windows and attic hatches. Applied properly, it should make these units airtight while allowing them to open and close freely.

Locating air leaks is the first step in the weatherstripping process. On cold, windy days you may be able to feel drafts coming through especially leaky doors and windows. Less severe leaks can be pinpointed by pulling a tissue or smoke pencil along the outside edge of doors and attic hatches and along the edges of window panes. If the smoke or tissue flutters, you've found an air leak.

Don't neglect to check areas that have been previously weatherstripped. Weatherstripping can wear and compact with age, and the natural warping or bending of windows and door units can further reduce the effeciveness of the seal.

To determine whether existing material is doing its job, open the door or window in question and close it on a piece of paper. If the weatherstripping does not provide resistance when you try to pull the paper out, it probably isn't providing resistance to air. Consider replacing or adjusting such ineffective materials.

The weatherstripping you use will depend on the type of door or window on which it will be installed and the size of the gap to be sealed. You must also consider whether you want the material to contact the face or edge of the unit. Most weatherstripping is sold with its own fastening system (screw-on and self-adhesive are the most common) and the design or location of some doors and windows may make a particular type of fastening system more appropriate. Don't base your decision solely on cost; less expensive materials are often less durable.

Weatherstripping falls into three basic categories.

- Pressure seal weatherstripping relies on the force of the door, window or attic hatch to effect a seal; it is used for all hinged doors and windows and both hinged and unhinged attic hatches.
- Sliding seal weatherstripping is always in contact with any closed part of the sliding door or window on which it is installed.
- Sweep-style seals are fastened to the bottom of doors; they are designed to allow the doors to open but to seal tightly when closed.

Weatherstripping seals best on smooth surfaces, so uneven or damaged surfaces should be smoothed or repaired before installation. All surfaces should be free of dust, oil and remnants of old weatherstripping. Doors and windows that are out of alignment may have to be adjusted before weatherstripping can work effectively.

Sliding windows (vertical or horizontal) can be sealed with weatherstripping applied between the frame and sash at the side, top and bottom, and where one sash meets another. Weatherstripping should also be sized properly – sometimes it helps to use a sample of the old weatherstripping to find a replacement. When sealing hinged windows, apply weatherstripping to all edges of the frame in which the moving section fits. Since fixed windows do not move, caulking should be used to seal all edges. Caulking is also preferable for sealing windows that are never opened.

Attic hatches are relatively easy to weatherstrip. Compressible tubes and strip weatherstripping should be applied along all sides of the frame where the hatch rests. Depending on the weight of the hatch, fasteners may be required to ensure a tight seal.

Shingles can be stapled

Losing shingles from your roof during a high wind is a common and costly problem. But the damage can be kept to a minimum by following proper precedures when installing them.

Whether you do the job yourself, or hire a professional roofer, make sure that the shingles are secured and applied properly. Putting shingles on wrong can lead to wind damage and may even affect the validity of the manufacturer's warranty.

New roofing shingles can be put on with nails or staples. When using nails, fasten the shingles with standard flat-head roofing nails long enough to penetrate into the deck.

Check manufacturers instructions. In general, nails should be placed just below the black self-sealing stripe and driven into the shingle straight and flush with the shingle tab.

Some large shingles may require four or six nails.

Tests have also shown that staples hold as well as nails if applied properly.

An important advantage to using staples is that they are faster to apply. The staples should be driven with the rown of the staple parallel with and below the self-sealing strip to a depth flush with the shingle.

As well, in order to conform with most manufacturer's warranties, staples must be driven with an approved pneumatic stapler.

Staples must be zinc coated, no less than 16 gauge and used on a one-for-one basis with nails. Shingles should be staples from the end nearest the shingle just laid.

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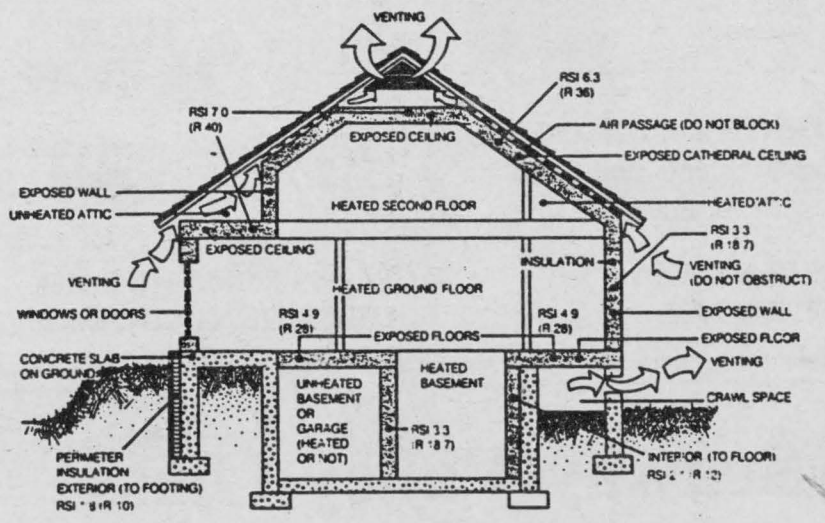
Insulation saves energy and money. Check your attic and make sure that all windows and doors are well weather-stripped to eliminate heat leaks. This will also stop cold drafts – making you more comfortable.

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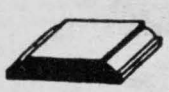
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For more energy efficiency information call:

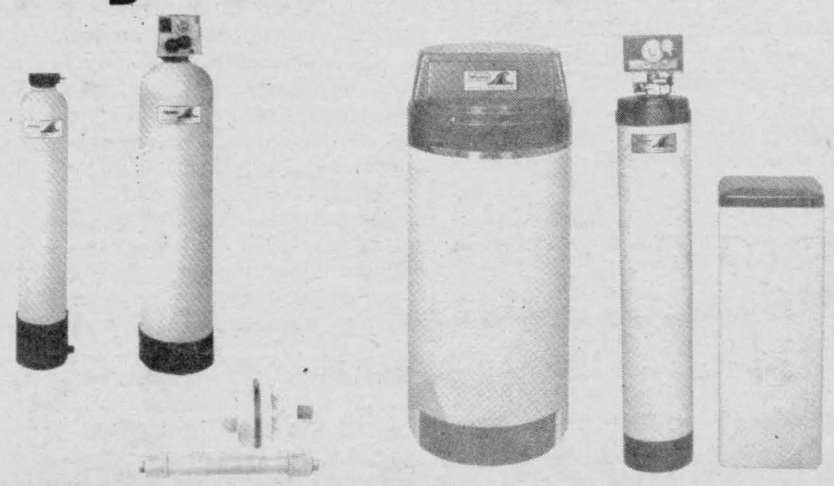
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Wood moulding

Profile	Name	Typical Applications
	Base	Installed where floor and walls meet. Protects walls from damage caused by kicks, bumps, furniture and cleaning tools.
	Casing	Primarily used to trim window and door openings. Also used as a base moulding, ceiling trim or picture framing material.
	Chair Rail	Used to prevent chairs from marring walls. Also used as a decorative element or divider between different wall finishes.
	Corner Guard	Used to protect corners or conceal the ragged edge where walls of different finishes meet at an outside corner.
	Cove	A moulding with a concave profile used mostly as a ceiling cornice. Small coves may be used as inside corner guards.
	Crown	An ornate moulding most often installed where walls and ceiling meet. Used to conceal larger areas than coves.
	Inside Corner	Conceals uneven joints or ragged seams where walls of different finishes meet at an inside corner.
	Lattice	A rectangular-shaped moulding that is among the most versatile of profiles. Uses range from furniture trim to trellises.
	Mullion Casing	A moulding that is installed over the window jambs in a multiple opening window. Also used as a decorative wall treatment.
	Ply Cap	Conceals and beautifies plywood's rough sandwich edge. Also used to cap the top of wainscotting.
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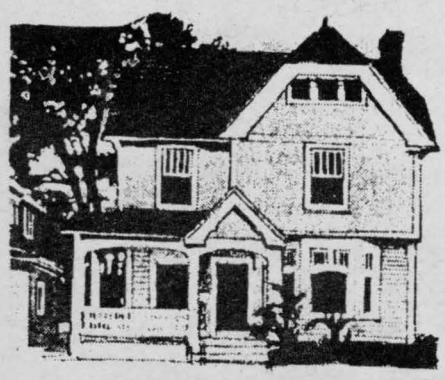


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It's not the heat, it's the humidity

You spend all kinds of money making your home airtight and then one morning you look at your windows and see that it has rained on your parade.

Surface condensation is like a soft rain on your walls and windows, only it's inside instead of outside the house. It happens when warm moist air strikes a cooler surface.

Understanding how moisture or water vapor acts in a house is essential to its control. Water vapor is like a gas; air vapor carries it from room to room.

For any level of air moisture (relative humidity) there is a surface temperature, of a wall or window, at which condensation will not form. Go beyond that level or lower the surface temperature and condensation may occur.

The first thing to do is take note of just where the condensation is occuring. Often it is only on windows and exterior walls, which tend to be too cool for the relative humidity in the air next to them. You can combat the problem either by:

1. decreasing the humidity or moisture in the air (the cheapest solution), or
2. increasing the surface temperatures of the walls and windows.

The key to decreasing unwanted moisture is to reduce overall moisture production -- unvented cooking, bathing or showering with the window closed and door open (a family of four can introduce the equivalent of two gallons of water into the atmosphere in a day), watering plants -- and then ensure adequate ventilation.

Exhaust fans are useful in windowless, high moisture level rooms such as kitchens and bathrooms. Opening windows just a crack while steaming food or showering will also help reduce some of the humidity.

If decreasing the moisture level doesn't work, you may have to consider increasing the surface temperatures of the walls and windows. A heating register along the offending wall can make all the difference.

Like the walls, wetness of the windows, or bleeding, results when the cold glass causes condensation of the moisture in the air in the room. Adding a second layer of glass or plastic can help solve the problem.

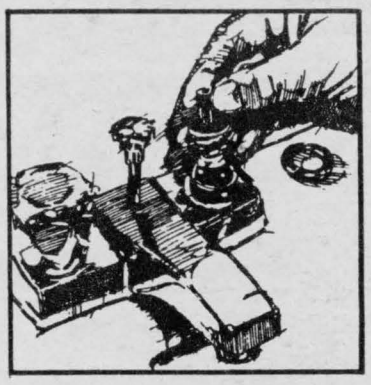
The attic of the house should also be properly vented. A general rule of thumb calls for one square foot of vent air for every 300 square feet of attic area.

Over-zealous energy conservation can sometimes aggravate condensation problems. Setting the thermostat back too far at night, when windows and walls are at their coldest, increases the probability of condensation forming.

If you notice excessive moisture on windows or walls, try a smaller nighttime setback, say three degrees Celcius, especially in the spring and fall when the outside air is damp.

Another handy weapon in the fight against condensation is a furnace fan.

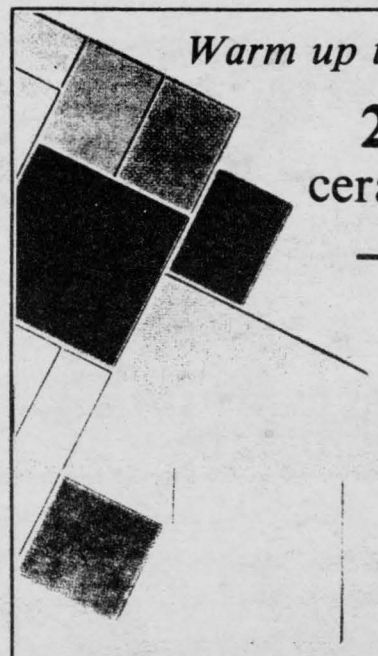




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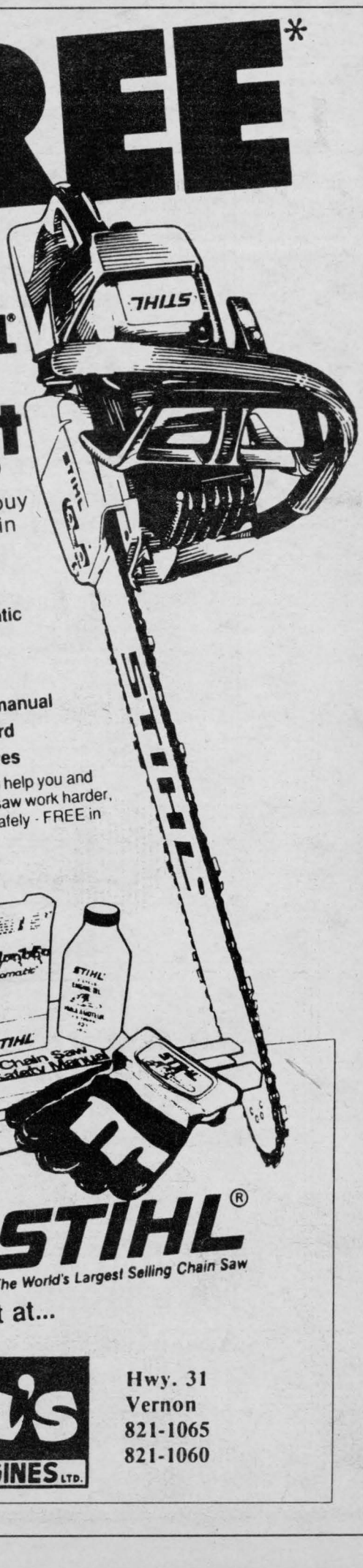
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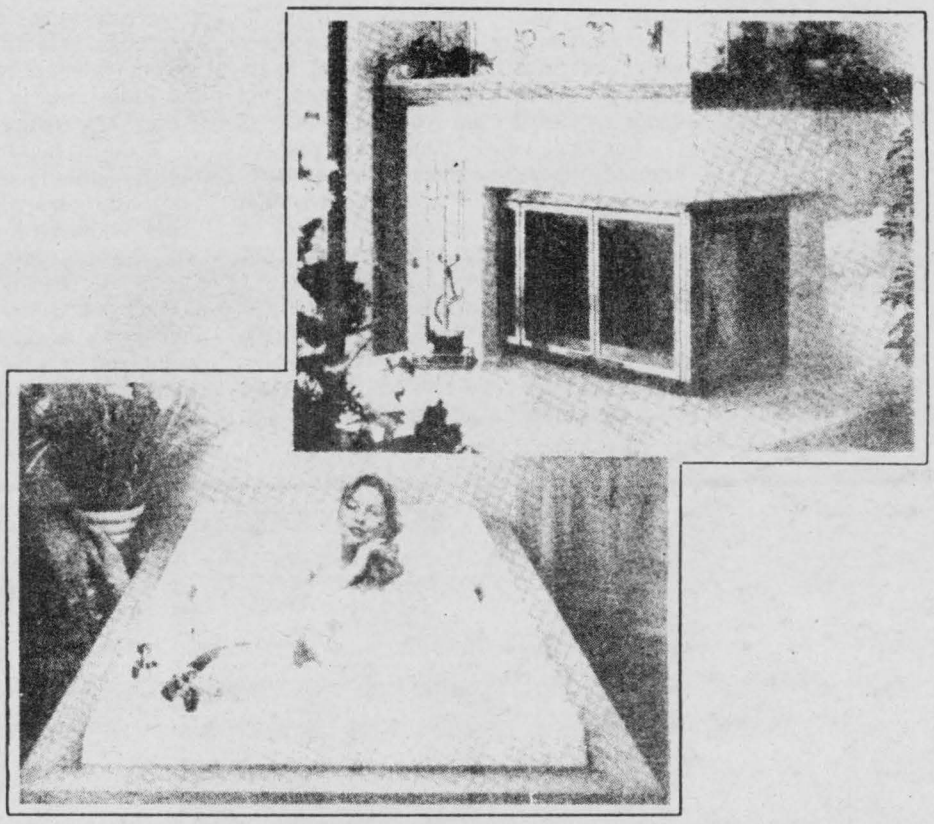


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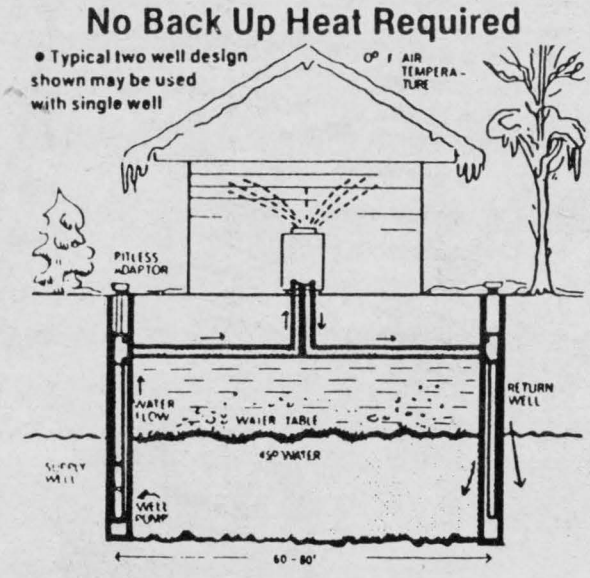
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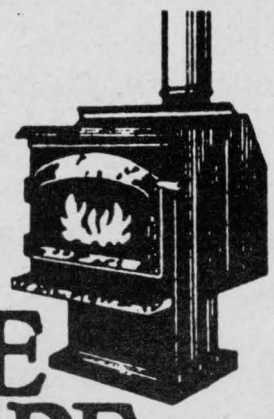
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Type of energy	Heat Content	Gross Efficiency	Unit Useable heat	Total Cost	% Saving
No 2 Fuel oil	160 000 Btu/gal	65%	107 900 Btu/gal	$12 61	75
Propane	110 000 Btu/gal	65%	71 500	$16 37	80
Natural Gas	1000 Btu/ft³	65%	650 Btu/ft³	$7 69	58
Electric Resistance	3413 Btu/Kw	100%	3413 Btu/KwH	$10 34	69
A/A Heat Pump	3413 Btu/Kw	150%	5120 Btu/Kwh	$ 689	54
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