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Tracking Down Home Heat Loss

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This is the time of year when energy savings and dollars are always on our minds. If you're like me, you shudder every time a utility bill appears. I open them and just peek into the envelopes as if to sneak up on the amount due and maybe lessen the shock of seeing how much it is.

Often at seminars, people ask how they can tell if they have a problem aside from the utility bill test. There are a number of things you can look for that can tell you if you have a heat loss problem. Most of them can be viewed from the exterior of your home on a frosty morning. All you need to do is merely walk around the exterior of your home and observe the things that happen.

For example, if you see damp spots on your exterior walls that correspond with interior locations of heat registers, you may have heat loss problems within the wall cavities. These damp spots may actually run vertically like a wide stripe up the wall that may indicate the location of vertical heat runs through the wall cavities. If the duct fills the cavity, there is no room for insulation behind the metal duct. Thus, the heat running through the duct may transfer to the outside wall material, resulting in the warm spot on the wall.

Condensation on the windows may also be a sign of heat loss. You will need to look at this a bit carefully. Notice where the condensation takes place. If it is on the inside face of the inside window, you may have excessive trapped humidity inside your home. If the condensation is on the inside face of the storm window, it may indicate that your prime windows are leaking and that the storm window is trying to do the job of the prime window. Another sign of window heat loss is a damp area around the window from the exterior. This may indicate that the air space between the rough construction opening and the window frame wasn't insulated before the trim casing was installed. This is a common area of window heat loss.

Moving upward, observe your roof. On a frosty day, you may be able to locate the rafter locations of your home by the striping effect that is taking place as the frost melts. You may also notice such things as premature frost melt around plumbing vents, chimney flashings, and over entire rooms such as baths or kitchens. On Cape Cod or Milwaukee Bungalows, you may be able to point out the second floor rooms that have angle ceilings by the pattern of frost melt. All indicate a possible heat loss problem.

During the dead of winter, one of the major indicators of a heat loss problem is ice dams. If your heat is migrating into your attic due to poor or inadequate insulation, the underside of the roof will preheat the roof snow pack. The snow will start to melt from the underside of the back and run down the roof until it hits the exterior wall area or gutters. Since these are unheated areas, the cascading water refreezes and the ice dam is created. The continuing melting snow or water gets trapped behind this dam and wicks to

the interior by whatever means possible. Thus, interior leaks, cracks, or the formation of mold and mildew may result. At least then the utility bills won't be quite as dreaded as they are now.

We hope this information has been helpful to you! If you have any further questions, please visit our website at www.aroundyourhouse.net, or contact Jim at Around Your House.

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