

INSULATION INFORMATION

NOT A SEXY ADDITION, BUT CAN BE A MONEY-SAVER

BY BETH WOOD

Insulation isn't a sexy investment, admits Keith Berkley of Berkley Construction in South Park, but it's a smart one. A green builder - and unabashedly enthusiastic about insulation - Berkley gives us sage advice, and throws in helpful analogies involving football and Ferraris.

Q: What are a few critical aspects of insulation homeowners should know?

A: What I've learned about installing insulation is that 60 to 70 percent of installers do it wrong. They often don't follow the specifications and leave gaps or bunching. Insulation should be put between studs and wherever there are gaps. Otherwise, you lose a huge percentage in R-value (the capacity of a material to resist heat flow).

Buildings are meant to separate you from the outside. Poor insulation is a crucial component of a home's chain. It can be a weak link. Inspectors come in and as long as it's there, a lot of them approve it, whether it's good insulation or not.

Q: How have the changing weather patterns affected San Diegans' approach to insulation?

A: It had been the last thing on people's list, because insulation is something you don't see. It's not a sexy investment. But recently, I've gotten more calls because San Diego is having more hot and cold weather. For generations, we've gotten away with poor building envelopes. (A building envelope is the physical separator between a home's interior and exterior, usually consisting of outside siding, weatherization sheet, sheathing (often plywood), insulation and framing.)

I work on a lot of old homes here and almost none of them have insulation. Now, I get calls all the time. If people wait until August, it's probably too late. This year, more people will try to get insulation before summer.

Q: What are the advantages



CALVIN BERKLEY
Insulation will add comfort and reduce energy consumption, said Keith Berkley of Berkley Construction.

to a well-insulated home?

A: They have many advantages - unless you like having weather inside. People want to be comfortable. However you like your house, insulation is the key. To combat high-energy bills, some people get solar. But to get lower bills and consistent air temperature, insulation is the way to go.

Q: What are other expenditures people make to save energy?

A: People spend a lot of money on windows. But new windows don't help as much as insulation. The worst wall has a better R-value than the best window. They're beautiful, though. Insulation is like the offensive line in football; quarterbacks and receivers are like the windows. If they make the touchdown, they couldn't have done it without the offensive line, but no one else notices.

Q: You're a green builder. Any tips on eco-friendly insula-

tion?

A: Fiberglass - you know, the pink stuff - is weird. It's a product that you wouldn't consider to be environmentally friendly. But if the purpose is conserving energy and you're using it for insulation, it's very green. You'll save energy. If you want the next step, you can get LEED-certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) fiberglass, but it's more expensive.

Q: How do you insulate crawlspaces and attics?

A: Underneath the house, you have to roll out rolls of insulation, which you secure with chicken wire.

In attics, you put in cellulose insulation with a blower. First, you have to clean out the attic. It's a gross job but you have to do it, vacuum it and get it clean. Then you look for holes. They are probably everywhere. Blow in as much insulation as you can. It makes a huge difference. Attics

are the most effective areas to install insulation - even more so than walls.

Q: How helpful are energy audits?

A: I'd recommend them to people with older homes and very high utility bills. If they're spending a lot of time trying to be comfortable in their house - from using space heaters in the winter and fans in the summer - they need an energy audit. They would want a certified energy audit expert.

But most people can find out the temperature inside the home and outside. The closer the two temperatures meet up, the worse your insulation is. That's a quick way to know. Play inspector. If your home is really cold at night and super hot in the day, you probably have a poor R-value.

Q: What are economical ways to insulate the home?

A: Insulating the attic brings the most bang for your buck. If you're remodeling or building a new home, installing exterior insulation is very easy. It's a no-brainer to invest in it. For insulation when you're building a home, it costs about \$4,500. If someone says \$3,500, expect a terrible job. Retrofitting costs quite a bit more - up to \$10,000.

Q: Do you have tips for homeowners in coastal neighborhoods?

A: Generally, sea air doesn't have ill effects on insulation. Many people on the coast don't think they need insulation. Coastal homes usually have high property values. It can be a great-looking house, but not having insulation is like having a Ferrari with a Moped engine.

Q: Anything to add?

A: If people are doing a house project, I'd recommend they invest 30 minutes in learning about insulation. That's going to be the most money you've ever made in 30 minutes. It will pay you back every day. You may never notice it, but it was a half-hour well-spent.

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