



Jack Griffith, owner of Infrared Energy Analysis, uses an infrared camera to detect cold spots in the walls, ceiling and around the windows of a home.

PHOTOS: LISA CAROLIN,
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Insulation business booming

High energy prices fueling demand

BY LISA CAROLIN
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With the cost of natural gas up significantly from last year, and consumers paying the price in their monthly heating bills, the demand for more insulation has been increasing since last fall.

"Almost every home out there is underinsulated according to the U.S. Department of Energy," says Jeff Lachowicz, co-owner of Custom Home Insulation in Howell. "Builders often insulate the cheapest way to pass codes, and homeowners pay for it."

Lachowicz says that building codes recommend R45 insulation in this area, but that many homes are insulated to the minimum code of R30 insulation. The code is a test of how fast heat is transferred through a material. Lachowicz says any home older than 15 years is probably severely underinsulated, and even 10-year-old homes can benefit from adding insulation.

"The best place to start insulating is the attic," says Lachowicz. "Heat rises so that's where most of the heat loss occurs. Homeowners can take a tape measure to measure how much insulation they have in their attics. They should have at least 12 inches."

Lachowicz, who owns Custom Home Insulation with his father, says they have been using cellulose, which is made out of recycled newspaper treated with fire



This is what the infrared camera sees: The darker colors indicate cold spots and the white indicates the hottest spots.

retardant, for insulation.

"Cellulose adds thermal mass to stop air infiltrating, which helps with cooling, too," says Lachowicz. "It's excellent for sound deadening and it's environmentally friendly. You can save 20 to 40 percent on heating and cooling bills, which is a pretty quick pay-back time."

Mark Keddle, owner of Cellulite Insulation Inc. in Marion Township, which also uses cellulose, says his company has seen a big increase in business since November.

"With heating bills rising by half as much, everyone wants to get a bid from us," Keddle says. "In the past only energy conscious homeowners came to us."

Keddle says half the business he's been doing is adding insulation to attics. Bob Veresan, corporate builder developer liaison for

DTE Energy, recommends checking more than just the insulation in your home for heat loss.

"If there are cracks in windows or doors, insulation won't help," Veresan says.

One technique for spotting leaks is infrared scanning. Jack Griffith is a certified building science thermographer whose Ann Arbor company, Infrared Energy Analysis, serves Livingston and Washtenaw counties. Griffith uses an infrared camera to locate points of air infiltration in the home as well as to assess insulation.

"The infrared camera will actually show inadequate insulation right through the wall," says Griffith. "It measures surface temperature using a color spectrum, and if there's a void in the insulation, it will show up as a cold spot."