



building inspection service, inc.

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Winter 2010 "House Sense" Newsletter



The cold weather is upon us. Sweaters, under shirts, heavy socks and shoes, coats, earmuffs, scarf's and hats are order of the day. Hopefully you also bundled up your home in order to keep your energy bills down and your home comfortable.

In December, I spoke at an Energy Savings Seminar sponsored by Paul's Volvo in Hawthorne, New Jersey. Lowes, the folks at Paul's, a Volvo factory representative, Irv Gordon, the million mile Volvo owner and I put on a wonderful, informative seminar. The main topic was not just the insulating of your home, but air sealing it as well. Many companies are now conducting energy audits to find where the air leakage is and then plugging it up. The location of the air leakage is where all those BTUs you just paid for are leaving. The longer you keep them in your home, the lower your energy bills will be.

DICO's Winter Home Tips:

- » Forgot to fix the weather stripping on that drafty door? Draft dodgers work great! They are a cloth tube filled with sand that you place across the bottom of your leaking door. Some even have Velcro strips that attach to the bottom of your door so you don't have to push them back when the door is opened.
- » If you haven't changed your old incandescent light bulbs yet, now is the time. The new LED or light emitting diode bulbs are out. Phillips is now marketing one that is color corrected to resemble the light from the incandescent bulbs we are used to. They are pricy around \$50.00 per bulb, but they are 90% more efficient than incandescent bulbs and last over 50,000 hours of use. Your standard incandescent bulb lasts only 1,200 hours.
- » Do you have some half burned candles you've saved from Thanksgiving? Good! They can have a second life not only as an emergency light source, but can prevent snow and ice from sticking on your snow shovel. Just rub the candle on your shovel like a surf or boogie board and then the snow won't stick. It will also remind you of summer and keep you warm as you exercise your arm. Do you have a sticking bureau drawer? Rub a little of that candle wax on the bottom of the drawer's guides and – Voila! It now slides easily! No candles left over? Use some non-stick cooking spray on your snow shovel.
- » In the last issue we suggested that you change your furnace filter and check your humidifier. Dry winter air makes you feel colder, it does not hold onto those BTUs and it can dry out wood floors, furniture and your body. The humidity level in your home should be around 35%. Plants and fish tanks add humidity into your home as well as cooking and bathing. But sometimes that's not enough. An easy way to check if there is enough moisture in the air is if there is a lot of static electricity. If you are constantly getting shocked, there is not enough humidity. If your windows are frosting up, you have too much humidity. If you need more humidity and you have forced air heating you can install a humidifier on the furnace. If you have a humidifier installed on your furnace check the humidistat setting simply turn the setting up or get it serviced. You can clean the evaporator pad by soaking it in a bath of white vinegar or simply replace the pad. If you don't have a forced air heating you can purchase a stand-alone humidifier. Some look like furniture that you put in your living room or family room. If you have radiators you can put a tray of water on top of the radiator. The water will evaporate and increase the humidity level. A little more work but no energy is used. My mom used to use old aluminum ice cube trays.
- » One of the big sources for air leakage out of your home is the fireplace if you have one. Even with the damper closed, those BTUs are escaping. Most fireplace stores sell red colored closed cell foam pillows that you can stuff under the damper and they plug up the air leakage. Most have a red handle and rope that hangs down so you don't forget that it is up there when you light your fire. Some gas utility companies installed these devices for free.
- » Are you hearing a noise in your attic or in the walls? It could be mice that have found free lodging for the winter. Because of the damage rodents can do, chewing insulation off of electrical wires, damaging insulation, and for health reasons, they are unwanted boarders. Good old fashioned snap traps work the best. Use a small amount of peanut butter on the flapper and place it perpendicular to a wall or where ever you think they are traveling. If you catch one, remove it by inverting a plastic bag over your hand. Pick the trap and mouse up, slide the bag over them, tie the bag in a knot and throw everything away. If you can, try to find the opening where the mice are entering and seal it up. If you don't want to do this yourself, most exterminators will. I like to refer John Foster from Four Seasons Pest Management in Verona. (973) 857 -8855. John follows the EPA's recommended procedure of IPM or Integrated Pest Management. He finds where the openings are and seals them up rather than applying poison. This method prevents them from coming back and stops the hot air leakage we just talked about.
- » With the coming of winter, my wife is buying bird seed for the birds and peanuts for the squirrels. Be sure to store those food products in tight plastic or steel containers. Pantry pests like the Indian Meal Moth Larvae are in a lot of bird food. They are a great source of protein for birds, but if they hatch and get into your kitchen, they will be in all your cereals, pastas and flour products. P.S. Squirrels – the American gray squirrel in particular, is considered a pest in England. They were imported in the 1800's as a new game and food source. They fell out of culinary favor and are now considered a pest. The English government is encouraging the British to eat them again and several prominent restaurants have put them back on their menus. Not my cup of tea! My wife would die if I ever cooked up one of her pets!

» You should have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Please check the batteries to be sure they are working. With our homes closed for winter, the carbon monoxide threat increases. It's referred to as the "silent killer" because it is odorless and tasteless. A small amount of carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms, make your body ache, make you nauseas and give you a headache. Carbon monoxide is a heavy gas so the detectors that plug into an electrical receptacle are very good.

And Now It's Trivia Time!

Your kitchen sponge can harbor over 7 billion organisms. A clean cutting board can have 62,000 bacteria per square inch. Now we all have heard the word "billion" so easily expressed by our politicians we tend to lose the feeling of how big that number really is. A billion minutes ago, the year would be 1956, I was 10 years old. Clean your sponges by placing them in the dish washer or by using a diluted solution of common bleach and water. One teaspoon bleach to one cup of water will do. Rinse the cutting board, counters and sink with the solution and dip that sponge in. If you use cloth towels, they should be changed daily and washed in hot water. The hot water and drying cycle will kill bacteria and viruses and their use will save paper towels – a good green thing to do!

Just cleaned your hands with an anti-bacterial wipe? Don't throw it away yet; wipe off your cell phone and even your steering wheel and dash. It will help you from catching your own cold back again.

Warren Buffet's newsletters from 1977 are available for free at www.berkshirehathaway.com.

Heat left over pizza in a non-stick pan on the stovetop over medium-low heat. It keeps the crust crispy. No tough micro-waved pizza!

Peppers with three bumps on the bottom are sweeter and better for eating. Peppers with four bumps on the bottom are firmer and better for cooking.

Bananas taken apart will ripen slower than when left in a clump.

We do a lot of driving around the holidays. Don't fall asleep at the wheel! If you are feeling drowsy, chew gum and crack open a window. If that doesn't help, pull over and head for the nearest hotel. It's not only your life at risk; it's the people who love you as well as others that might be on the road along with you that could be hurt.

Using cold water to wash your clothes will save approximately \$70.00 per year in hot water savings. Today's detergents work as well in cold water as they do in hot water.

Think football, basketball and baseball players get big bucks? The first athlete to get a million dollar endorsement was a professional bowler Don Carter in 1964. In 1964, bowling was big business and the contract was signed with Ebonite International, a bowling ball manufacturer.

In 1898 there were fewer than 4,000 cars in the United States, but there were over 18 million horses. Now the total number of motor vehicles in the United States is over 237 million, and just over 9 million horses.

Well that brings us to the end of this newsletter. Enjoy the winter weather and see you in the Spring!

Have a great Holiday!



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