



Gearing Up for Winter

By Tom Lienhard, PE, CEM

Fall is almost here which makes now the best time to make sure your home is ready for the coming heating season. When it's cold outside, it may be too late to do some measures like caulking that can help you save energy during winter and help keep you comfortable inside.

Homes breathe and move, so caulking that is several years old may have pulled away from surfaces because of wind, rain and temperature changes. Look for old caulk that needs replacing, then re-caulk around windows, doors and other places where two dissimilar materials meet up.

Make sure that insulation in your crawl space has not dropped from the floor above, that ductwork in unconditioned parts of your home is sealed and insulated, and that water pipes are insulated and freeze protected.

If you don't have insulated windows, consider using plastic to create storm windows by tacking it to exterior window trim with a thin trim strip. Make sure to caulk the window so cold air will not infiltrate your home. A do-it-yourselfer can do this for less than \$10 per window. How do you know if air infiltration is bad? Consider if you feel air coming in a window, if you can you hear everything outside as if the window is open, and if you avoid sitting near the window in the winter because it is too uncomfortable. Stopping air infiltration will not only help lower your energy use, it can also make your home more comfortable.

An easy way to check for leaks around doors is to have someone run a flashlight around the exterior door jam at night while you stand inside in the dark. If you see light, make any needed repairs or add weather-stripping. Also, think about anything added to your home during the year that may have penetrated walls, and fill in those penetrations.

If your attic is well ventilated and insulated, you will be less likely to have ice dams build up on eaves. Clean out your gutters so water doesn't get trapped and freeze. Make sure gutters have not sagged, so melting snow and winter rain can drain properly.

Preparation is the best way to make sure winter cold stays outside your home.

Tom Lienhard is a lead engineer at Avista. You can reach him with questions and comments at askavista@avistautilities.com.