

Caulking: an inexpensive approach to energy savings

Caulking is one of the least expensive energy conservation measures, especially if you do it yourself. In fact, the money you save in heating costs will usually pay for the work within a year or so.

As much as 40 per cent of the heat lost by your house escapes to the outside world through numerous cracks and crevices. At the same time, cold air seeps in through these building openings. Caulking reduces this infiltration and exfiltration of air, making it one of the most effective ways to improve the energy efficiency of your house.

Caulking is the correct material to use to seal any fixed joint where air leakage occurs. A fixed joint is one where the two surfaces do not move relative to each other. In places where two surfaces do move relative to each other, such as between the moving parts of windows, weatherstripping is the correct sealing material.

The first step is to determine what fixed joints in your home are permitting air leakage. Cold, blustery days are ideal for this work, because you'll be able to feel the cold air coming into your home through major air leaks. You can pinpoint less apparent leaks by pulling a tissue or smoke pencil around suspected areas. A flutter of the tissue or smoke indicates the presence of an air leak.

Thoroughly examine the interior surfaces of all outside walls, from baseboard to ceiling. Other common areas of air leakage include attics (especially around wiring) and attic hatches; basements (particularly sill plates); doors, windows and patio doors (including trim); electrical outlets, switches and service panels; fireplaces; baseboards; vents; plumbing stacks; service entrances; joints between the wall and ceiling; lighting fixtures; and chimneys.

Even if you've already caulked these areas, check them again. Normal building shifting and settling can reduce the effectiveness of caulking over time.

All caulking to reduce air leakage should be done from the inside. The exception to this rule is where gaping holes on the exterior of the house permit rain and snow to enter the building shell. No matter how well sealed a house is, some air may escape into the attic and wall cavities. If the outside surface is sealed, the moisture in the outgoing air may be trapped in the building shell. This moisture may then condense and cause problems ranging from damaged insulation to deteriorated building materials.

However, some products have unpleasant odours and it may be necessary to ventilate the areas where the caulking is being done.

Once you determine where and when you're going to caulk, the next step is to purchase the required materials. Don't make a rush decision; in most cases, caulking will be permanent. A high-quality material may cost slightly more, but it also may perform better over the long run and can help you avoid the expense and inconvenience of having to replace the material a few years down the road.

When buying caulking, you should compare the relative merits, including cost, of a variety of materials. Ensure that any product you choose is suitable for indoor use, is durable, will adhere to the surfaces involved and can be painted over if necessary. Some products are particularly suited to specific applications, such as those that perform well in areas subjected to high levels of moisture, and those that can accommodate a fair amount of movement in the joint. Product labels and manufacturers' literature are good sources of information about specific brands.

There are three broad categories of caulking materials: semiliquid, solid and foam sealants. The properties and applications of each are outlined below.

Semiliquid materials are the most commonly used caulking. They come in tubes and are applied with a caulking gun. (Good-quality guns are available at a modest cost.) Semiliquid caulking can be used alone for most joints less than 6 mm in width. Wider joints may have to be stuffed with a backer rod, oakum, or glass or mineral fibre insulation. Ensure that any surface to be caulked is clean and dry and that a primer is used if recommended by the manufacturer.

Using a caulking gun well takes some practice and a steady hand. Beginners can complete a short apprenticeship by caulking areas that will later be covered, such as joints behind a baseboard, before graduating to areas where the final appearance of the work is more important. You might consider also using a colourless caulking material where esthetics are a concern. This caulking dries clear, so minor flaws caused by shaky hands will not be as noticeable.

There are two schools of thought on how to apply semiliquid caulking. One method calls for the nozzle of the caulking tube to be cut at a 45-degree angle, with the opening large enough to cover both sides of the joint. The trigger is

pulled along the crack.

The second approach is also effective, particularly when you want to force the caulking into the crack. In this method, the nozzle of the caulking tube is cut squarely rather than at an angle. The gun is then held perpendicular to the joint and the material is applied so that the caulking runs slightly ahead of the gun and rises slightly behind it.

Over time, all caulking materials (except acoustical caulking) will dry and harden. Some materials begin this curing process very quickly by forming a skin shortly after application. It's a good idea to keep a rag handy to wipe off excess material as soon as possible. If the caulking needs to be smoothed, this can be done before the skin forms with either a putty knife or a wetted finger.

Remodeling your kitchen

Imagine this scenario: After a hard day's work, you come home to a kitchen in total upheaval, with no running water and empty containers of Chinese food stacked near the space where the compactor is to be installed.

You have entered into this situation willingly and expect it to continue for another three to 10 weeks.

Not only do you think chaos is a small price to pay for a remodeled kitchen—you have in fact paid a very high price to go through this.

You locate the phone cord and follow it to the phone. Your finger dials the Chinese restaurant as a conditioned response...

With kitchen remodeling the most popular home-improvement project in America, this scenario is familiar to many.

Remodeling does not have to cause major upheaval, however. In fact, gradual remodeling, project by project, is a growing trend that makes living through the process considerably easier.

For example, two common remodeling goals—improving use of space and increasing efficiency—can be achieved

with the following projects.

Undersink dishwasher

If you'd love never having to hand wash another dish but don't have room for a dishwasher without breaking down walls or sacrificing cabinet space, install an undersink dishwasher.

GE's Spacemaker™ undersink dishwasher converts the typically wasted space beneath the sink into a time and work-saving kitchen helper.

GE and several sink manufacturers offer special sinks compatible with the installation. They come in two styles: A 6 in. deep single bowl sink that fits in 24 in. of counter space or a 6 in. deep double bowl that requires 36 in. of counter-space.

With the larger sink, the dishwasher can be offset to leave 12-in. of space free for a disposer.

PHOTO REPRINTS
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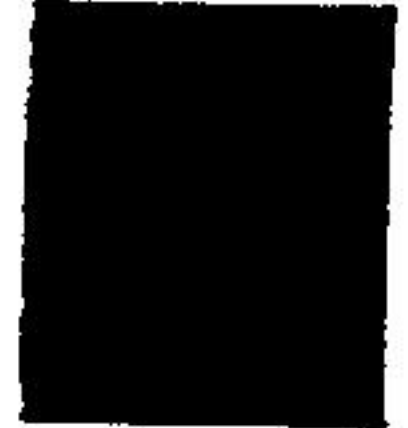


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THE EXCHANGE HOTEL

December 5th, 1980, marked the grand opening of the Trafalgar, Esquesing and Erin Plank Road. The firm road of planks proved a great boon to the local farmers who could now get their grain to Oakville in 3 hours for the low toll of three shillings. No longer did the impassable roads of late fall cause them to get low grain prices.

However, once the Grand Trunk Line arrived in Georgetown, the plank road became obsolete as farmers used the railway to transport their grain.

Many thanks to Elaine Bertrand, Walter Lewis and Mark Rowe. We'd love to hear from you!



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