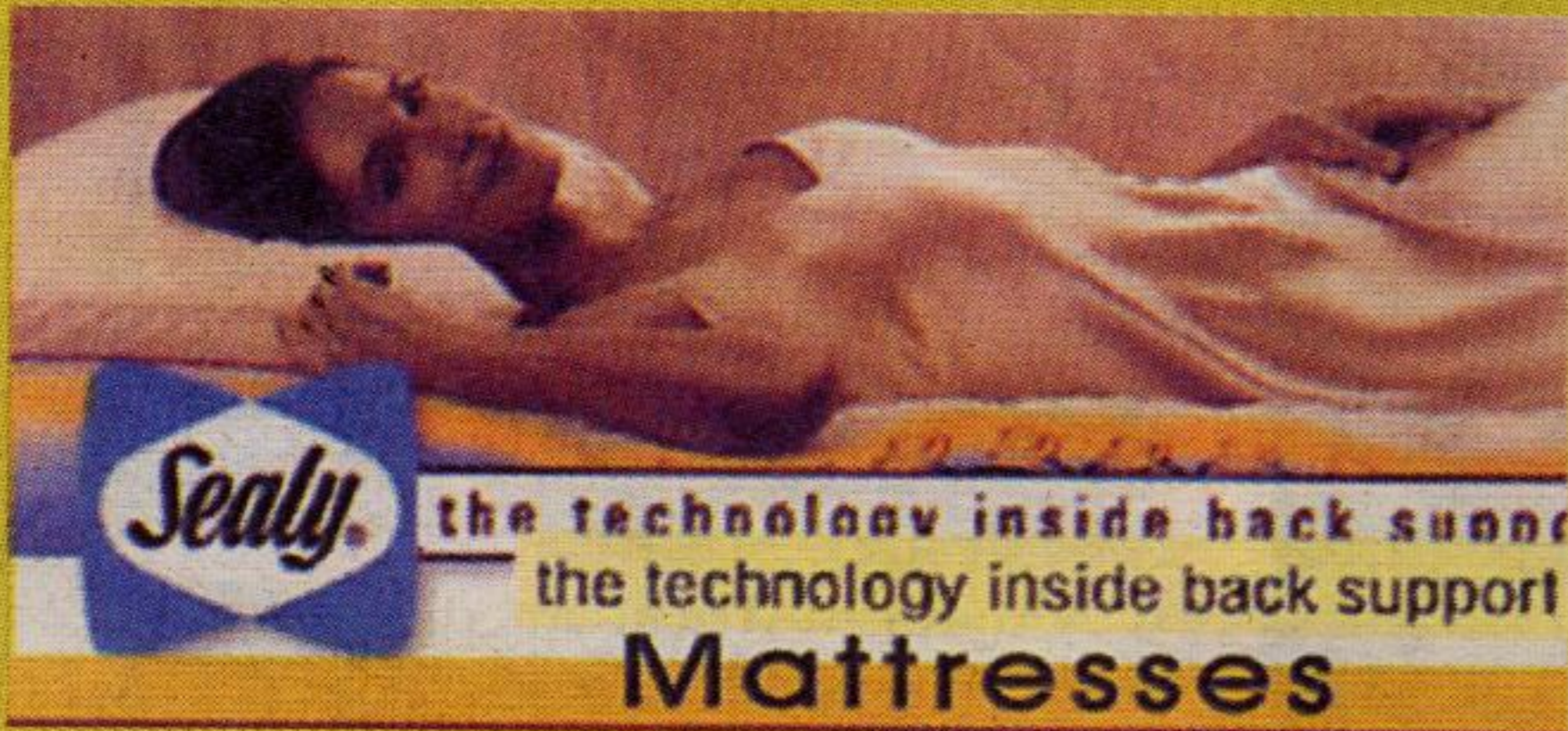




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How to caulk out the cold

With the cost of escalating heating bills, you cannot afford to let any cold air seep into your house or any warm air escape. Take some time this fall to prepare your windows and doors for winter winds.

Start by checking the stationary parts of your windows and door frames. All movable parts should be sealed with unworn weatherstripping. Move outside where the house siding meets at the corners, roof or foundation. Check vents, skylights, chimneys, water faucets and places where wiring enters the house. Look for gaps. A flashlight can be used to detect small gaps.

When choosing a caulk to seal gaps, look first for one that has a long lifespan. When caulk gets old, it cracks and no longer serves its purpose. The least expensive caulk may not last as long as the more expensive, so be aware of your needs and what is more economical for you. One of the most popular caulks is acrylic latex. It goes on smoothly and can be cleaned up with soap and water. For bricks and metal surfaces, you might want to try neoprene or butyl caulk. They are stickier and harder to apply, but work better for these kinds of surfaces. To clean up, you will have to use turpentine or mineral spirits. You may paint either one of these types of caulk if you wish. Silicone caulk is another choice. It will probably last the longest, but must be cleaned with a solvent and cannot be painted. However, it does come in common colors and clear.

Caulk comes in cartridges, or card-

board tubes. It is applied by placing the cartridge in a cartridge gun. To load the gun, pull the plunger back and insert the cartridge. Then press the nozzle of the cartridge into the slot at the front of the gun and squeeze the trigger several times until you tighten the plunger against the cartridge. Once you have loaded the cartridge, take a sharp knife and cut off the end of the nozzle at a 45-degree angle so that the opening is oval in shape and about 3/8 of an inch in diameter. Use a long nail to puncture inside of the nozzle and hold on to the nail if it has a head. You can use it later to plug the nozzle and save the leftover caulk for next time.

Before applying the caulk, clean and dry the area. Fill areas over 1/2 an inch in diameter or depth with wadded fiberglass or filler. Then place the caulk gun at a 45-degree angle to the end of the seam that is to be filled. Push or pull the gun gently along the seam while squeezing the trigger and remember to keep moving the gun



between trigger pulls. The goal is to have a smooth, uniform stream of caulk in the seam. To stop the stream of caulk, push the nozzle into the caulking and twist it as you pull away. Then pull the plunger away from the cartridge to stop the oozing. You shouldn't have to smooth the caulk, but if you do, use the back of a spoon dipped in mineral spirits. This will reduce the chance of the caulk cracking as it dries. If you are going to paint over the caulk, let it dry completely. Caulk shrinks as it dries, so your paint might crack if you apply it too soon.

—By Kathy Scott, special

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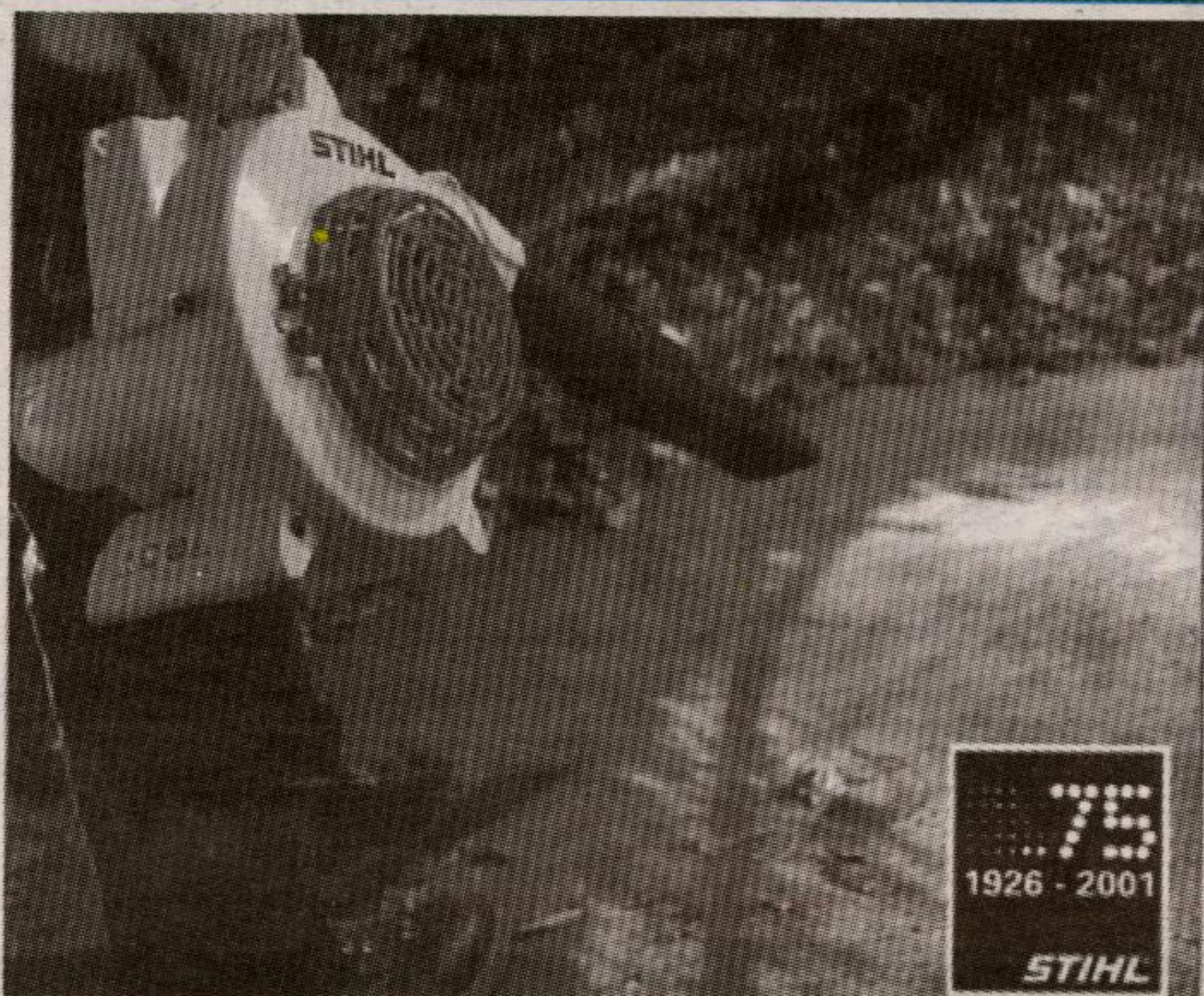
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