

# Draftproofing— a low-cost answer to efficiency

If you're interested in improving the energy efficiency and comfort of your home, draftproofing should be your first priority. This low-cost home improvement project is ideal for both skilled and novice do-it-yourselfers but requires some care in product selection and application.

Draftproofing involves sealing unwanted cracks and penetrations in the exterior walls, foundation and roof of your home. Sealing the routes by which warm indoor air can escape from your home will eliminate a costly source of heat loss, as much as 30 per cent of the total heat loss can be traced to warm air leaking to the outdoors. Sealing air leaks will also make your home more comfortable by eliminating cold drafts caused by incoming winter air.

## Finding the air leaks

Draftproofing begins with a careful examination of the inside surfaces of your exterior walls and ceiling to identify the areas through which air can enter and leave the home. Common air leakage sites include:

- where the exterior wall meets the foundation (sill plate)
- where electrical, plumbing, or heating service lines penetrate the building shell
- around door and window frames
- around electrical outlets on exterior walls
- around the joints between walls and the ceiling
- along baseboards
- around attic hatches and lighting fixtures
- around fireplaces and exhaust fans
- around chimneys and plumbing stacks

A thorough visual inspection will usually be sufficient to identify most of the cracks which need to be sealed. However, you can also use what is called a flutter test to identify less apparent leaks. Simply take a tissue, candle, or smoke source such as an incense stick and move it slowly around the interior of the outside walls, preferably on cold windy days. A flutter of the tissue, flame or smoke indicates an air leak.

Once you've located the air leakage sites, the next step is to determine which sealing material is appropriate for the draftproofing job. Caulking, weatherstripping, or both may be required.

## Caulking

Caulking is used to seal joints or cracks where two surfaces meet but do not move

relative to each other, such as at a sill plate or a plumbing penetration. It's a low cost energy conservation measure which should pay for itself in reduced heating costs within a year or two, especially if you do it yourself.

Caulking to reduce air leakage should be installed on the inside of your house. This will help prevent warm, moist air from getting into the attic and wall cavities, where it can con-

dense and cause moisture damage to insulation and building materials. Leaving the outside surface of the wall unsealed (except to prevent water entry) also provides an escape route for any moisture which enters the building shell from inside your house.

Once you determine where and when you're going to caulk, the next step is to purchase the required materials. Compare the relative

merits of a variety of materials. The product you choose should be durable and suitable for indoor use. Make sure it will adhere to the surfaces involved, and that it can be painted over if necessary. A high quality material may cost slightly more, but it will also be easier to apply and should last longer than cheaper materials.

Caulking materials come in three broad categories: semi-liquid, solid, and foam.

Semi-liquid caulking, the most common material, comes in tubes and is applied with a caulking gun. It is appropriate for sealing joints of varying widths, depending on the type of sealant, backer requirements and the amount of movement the joint is likely to experience. Read the label for the manufacturer's recommendations.

Solid caulking comes in a roll of rope or cord and is designed for hard-to-caulk areas such as the corners of windows and gaps which are too wide for semi-liquid caulking alone. Installation usually involves pressing the rope or cord into the crack to be filled as the rope or cord is unwound. When the job is finished, the roll is broken off.

Foam sealants are sold in aerosol cans and are similar in appearance to shaving cream. They are useful for sealing sill plates, shim spaces around windows and exterior doors, and other openings that are too large for conventional caulking. Because they are pressurized and expand rapidly when applied, they can be difficult to use.

Foam sealants deteriorate when exposed to sunlight, so they should be suitably protected after application. As well, these materials are a fire hazard if not covered by a fire resistant material such as gypsum board. Beware of contact with surrounding furnishings and clothing, as the foam is very hard to remove.




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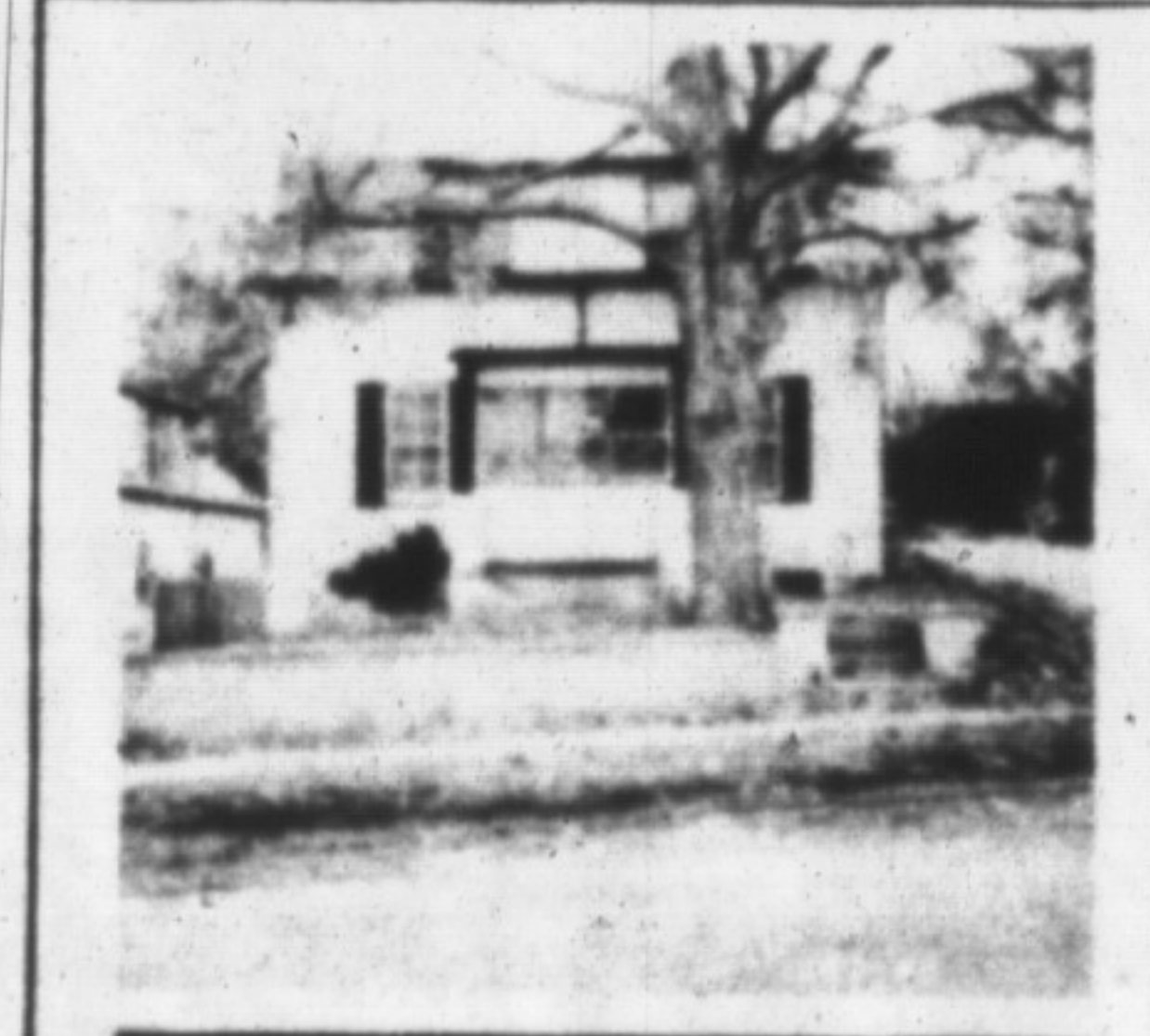


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