

Here's a method of making the most of your home's heating system

You've sealed the air leaks and added insulation; now consider your heating system. Is it sabotaging your energy conservation efforts? If your furnace is too large, too inefficient, improperly maintained or too old, you're wasting energy.

When you've sealed and insulated, you may discover that your heating system is no longer appropriate to your lower energy needs. So you may want to buy a smaller more efficient unit, especially if your present system is near the end of its life. If you have an oil furnace, you should probably think about switching to another fuel, like natural gas or electricity. The federal government's Canada Oil Substitution Program (COSP) is intended to assist homeowners with the initial expenses of conversion. If you convert from oil to one of the allowable alternative fuels, you may be eligible for a taxable grant paying 50 per cent of the cost, up to \$800. For more information, write The Federal Conservation and Renewable Energy Office, 2242 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto, Ontario M8V 1A5.

Keep in mind that if you change from oil to natural gas, you'll probably have to install a chimney liner to prevent the brickwork from being eroded by the condensing flue gases. Upgrading your present oil furnace might be a sensible alternative if it's still in good shape.

If you're considering either replacement or upgrading, the free booklet **Make the Most of Your Heating System** (published by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) will describe your options and help you come to an informed decision. Then, talk over your plans with a heating contractor.

In the meantime you can improve the operation of your present system. And of course if you're keeping the furnace you now have, you want it working at maximum efficiency.

There are a number of simple strategies to improve the performance of any heating system.

First, you should ensure that the furnace is functioning properly by having it inspected and serviced. Regular inspections are essential for safety and must be done by a certified oil burner mechanic or gas fitter. Oil systems need servicing yearly, while gas systems should be serviced once every two years.

The **Billpayer's Guide to Furnace Servicing**, available from the federal Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, gives detailed explanations of what's necessary for proper servicing. Briefly, it means cleaning or replacing dirty parts, checking the safety controls and tuning the burner.

But there's more to maintenance than the occasional service call. Ask the serviceman to explain the operation of your furnace and to demonstrate the procedures you can do for yourself. Most basic of these is cleaning or changing the filters. A furnace with clogged or dirty filters can burn up to 25 per cent more fuel, so regular cleaning should noticeably lower your fuel consumption. You can also adjust the furnace fan belt to ensure that it's at the right tension, permitting about 25 mm (one inch) of play.

You can improve the efficiency not only of your furnace but of your heat distribution. A recent Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing study reported that a forced air system delivers an average of only one third of the heat generated by the furnace to the rooms upstairs. The ducts are generally uninsulated and leaky, spilling much of the heat into the basement and walls. If your basement is warm, you can probably assume this is why. Seal ductwork joints with silicone caulking or commercial duct tape and insulate ducts that are longer than 2 metres, especially if they run through a cold room. You can buy a foil-faced fiberglass duct wrap made for this purpose.

Balance your heating system by adjusting the dampers and floor

registers and closing the registers in rarely used or overheated rooms. You may have to experiment to get the warmth where you want it. Make sure the

heating outlets aren't blocked by furniture and drapes.

The efficiency of hot water distribution systems can be similarly improved.

Insulate exposed heating pipes with foil-faced fiberglass pipe wrap. Make insulated boards to place behind your exterior wall radiators: you do this by

cutting a piece of foil-faced rigid insulation to a size slightly smaller than the rad itself. Leave an air space between the insulation and the radiator. From time to time, bleed air from the radiators by opening the valves until all the air bubbles sputter out.

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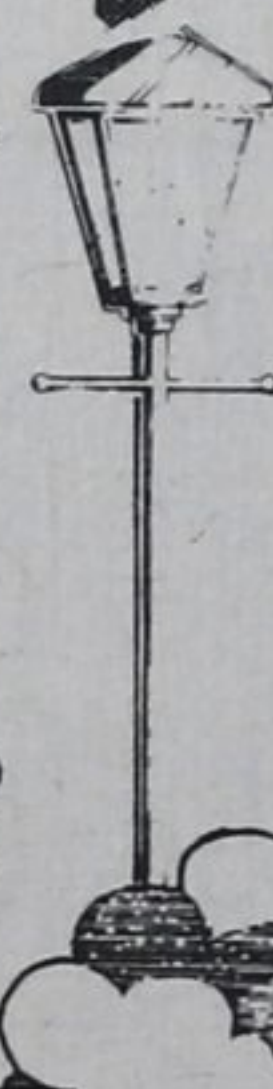
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