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Business booming for sellers of alternative heat sources

From page 3.

"We sold three tractor-trailer loads of pellets last year," he said.

Vince Van Limbeek of Queensville is an ardent supporter of pellet stoves. He has a freestanding stove and a fireplace insert.

"We're pretty happy," Mr. Van Limbeek said. "It sounds kind of funny, but it's a more comfortable heat."

He says he has definitely saved

money over the past three or four years on his heating bill. One stove comfortably heats the lower floor of his old two-storey farmhouse. The second heats an addition, which he claims would have cost a fortune to heat by more conventional means.

Snowball Hearth and Home in Aurora doesn't carry pellet stoves, but demand for high-efficiency wood stoves has doubled, according to Ron Shaw.

Customers aren't saying whether

their decisions are driven by costs, but "wood stoves have just gone wild", he said.

While Snowball once sold about the same number of gas products as wood, Mr. Shaw estimated it's now about 70 per cent wood products.

While he estimated one could save up to \$1,500 a year over heating with oil and gas, he also suggested uncertainty about the electricity supply might be driving people to wood as a more reliable form of heating.

The efficiency of wood stoves and fireplace inserts has doubled as manufacturers have worked to meet environmental standards, he said.

What once was vented as smoke, now burns inside the stove, producing 35 per cent more heat. That means a stove that might have burned through three bush cords of wood in a winter now uses two.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources says a high-efficiency fireplace installed in the main living area of a medium-sized house can provide almost all the heat needed.

A high-efficiency fireplace insert could be an option for those who already have an existing masonry fireplace.

Older or larger houses using a forced air furnace that uses a more costly fuel is an add-on wood furnace installed beside the existing furnace. The duct work is modified so it can be shared by both furnaces.

With the use of fireplaces and other wood-burning appliances likely to

increase this winter, Vaughan deputy fire chief Greg Duncan offered a few words of advice.

First and foremost, the chimney must be maintained by a certified technician, especially if it hasn't been used for a while and using the right kind of firewood is vital.

"It seems obvious, but you need good dry wood that burns cleanly and hot," he said.

He also cautioned against storing firewood close to the appliance and keeping the area around the fireplace or stove free of combustibles.

Energy Minister Donna Cansfield has announced Ontario consumers will be receiving a one-time credit on their upcoming electricity bill. That means a family in a detached home can expect a credit of about \$60.

And PowerStream, the electricity distribution company that serves Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Aurora, has filed an application with the Ontario Energy Board for a rate reduction effective May 1, 2006.

If approved, the average residential or low-volume customer in PowerStream's service territory using 1,000 kWh in a month will see a total monthly savings of about \$3.38. The average general service customer who consumes 2,000 kWh a month will save \$4.30.

However, if all alternatives sound like too much and the savings and credits from electricity consumption sound insignificant, remember thermal underwear can help keep the chill away.

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