

Movable insulation helps stop window heat loss

By Penny Wright
special writer

Historians tell us that during the reign of Henry III of England, the glass-covered windows were a status symbol of the rich.

Henry III, a fashion-conscious king, had glass panes installed throughout his many castles including the royal prison in Windsor Castle, the moatless walls to the trouble of installing double glazing, adding a white wall of glass to the outside of an interior set of panes.

Was this for added prestige? Or, was this an early attempt to deal with a drawback all windows share — heat loss.

NOWADAYS, despite the pleasures of large window expanses, heat leakage problems associated with a thin, transparent film covering a hole in the wall are increasingly on consumers' minds.

Cynthia Fridgen, housing and energy specialist with Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service, said, "We know that 35 percent of a home's total heat loss goes out through the windows."

What can be done about this? Fridgen contends that after caulking, weather stripping, and adding storm windows, the logical step is installing movable-type interior and exterior insulating treatments.

Such devices provide a means of control-

ling heat transmission while improving interior comfort levels. "We are seeing a consensus that as long as you have to put something up on the window, it might as well save some money in utility bills."

DURING A VISIT to the Detroit area this summer, University of Michigan graduate architect William Langdon, author of the book "Movable Insulation," also noted the increasing interest in energy-efficient window treatments.

"The movable insulation field is changing fast. What was once the turf of the researcher now is an industry."

Since writing his book three years ago, Langdon has seen a shake-down in the window insulation industry. Some products have failed to stand up to the wear of daily use, constant temperature swings, and ultra-violet degradation.

"Window insulation products haven't really been tested to any standards," said Langdon. "The best thing a customer can do is check installed systems."

The architect predicted more innovations in window treatments, with emphasis on attractiveness as well as fuel savings.

ALREADY THE choices are mind-boggling.

Window insulation shoppers can now choose from a wide assortment of shades, slats, blinds, shutters, screens and panels.

These options come in a dazzling array of fabrics and materials that borrow many of their energy conserving features from space-age technology.

Compound this with the fact that each product boasts a range of R-values (resistance to heat transfer), and varied vapor barrier and light reflecting abilities. The result can be consumer chaos.

Aware of this, the MSU Extension Service offers programs to help consumers find a window treatment appropriate to their needs. Extension slide packets and informational bulletins explain window problems, detail do-it-yourself window treatment options, and list shopping tips for commercial products.

"WE TRY TO PERSONALIZE a window treatment plan to a family's needs," said Extension specialist Fridgen. Often this will entail recommending different treatments for each room in the home.

For example, north and west windows exposed to the brunt of harsh winds demand high R-values. Even under some circumstances, could even remain covered throughout the winter.

Fridgen emphasized, "The whole story is not R-value. A window shade with a high R-value that fits the window poorly won't stop cold air leaks."

She continued, "Good edge seals are important."



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Penny Wright demonstrates the "movable insulation" that reduces heat loss from the patio door of her Plymouth house.

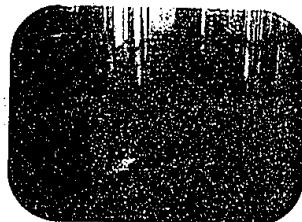
Workshop focuses on board, administration

Thursday, Nov. 3, in Rooms B200-210 of the Liberal Arts Building on campus.

The workshop will cover roles and responsibilities of a board and an administrative staff, as well as good board/staff relations.

Registration must be received one week prior to the workshop. For more information, call 591-8400 ext. 409.

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