winters
home energy-efficient

During cold-weather months, there is nothing like an energy efficient log fire to keep Jack Frost at bay.

19 fiberglass insulation.

Four areas around the house should be insulated: basement walls, any floor above an unheated crawl space, the masonry wall of the crawl space and any wall (such as between house and garage) that separates a heated space from an unheated one.

Make sure fiberglass and other non-rigid types of insulation are protected with a properly installed vapor barrier. Otherwise, they can quickly turn into a soggy, useless mess.

Vapor barriers come attached to some types of insulation or can be installed separately. But to be effective, they must leave no gaps for moisture passage.

Your home's heat could be slipping through the cracks. Search for drafts by placing a lighted candle near shut doors, window frames, and corner and wall joints. If it flickers, there is an air passage. Seal cracks on the exterior with a flexible caulking compound.

DOORS AND WINDOWS are a major source of heat loss. Make sure weather stripping makes a tight seal around the edges.

Your fireplace may seem romantic, but it also represents a large hole in the ceiling through which a huge amount of heat escapes. Be sure to keep the damper closed when the fireplace is not in use.

Insulate your hot water heater. If its pipes run through an unheated space and there is any chance the space may freeze, the pipes should be insulated as well.

Here is a bonus: An insulated hot water heater reduces the time you wait when you turn on the tap.

Make sure the vents in your heating system are free of dust and dirt. Clean or replace the filter, if necessary. Make sure the duct tape is secure. If you have had any problems with the thermostat, have it checked by a heating service person.

Because heat flows from warm to cold, in winter much of it escapes through the walls of your home's foundation. In an otherwise well-insulated two-story home an uninsulated foundation can account for up to 22 percent of the home's heat loss. Foundation insulation isn't difficult to install; you can do it yourself if you're handy.