

Cozy up to warmth of hot-water heat

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

HOME IS where the hearth is — if for no other reason than that's where the heat comes from.

But what if you don't have a hearth? Or a pot-bellied stove? Or a furnace? What if you're building a house and a heating alternative hasn't been decided? Or you're thinking of changing the heating system you have?

Add another option to the list, an old option with some new refinements called hot-water heating.

Hot-water heating has changed considerably from the old days when hefty, coal-heated boilers and clanking radiators and rusty pipes were the norm.

Today, boilers are far more efficient. Radiators have been reduced to baseboard units that take up far less room. These systems are more expensive than forced-air systems, but some of its advantages may make additional installation expense palatable.

Modern hot-water baseboard units measure about eight inches high and three inches deep. They operate without fans for blowing air and rely on radiant heating. Piping connections are made with soldered copper tubing, usually three-quarters of an inch to one inch in diameter, so there is little difficulty in

snaking tubing through walls and tight places.

These systems are also easily expandable by adding tubing and more baseboard units that are far less bulky than large air ducts. Forced-air furnaces might also need a larger blower unit.

IMPROVED COMFORT, according to its proponents, is the main benefit of hot-water baseboard heating because these systems disperse heat more evenly. Forced air heating, they contend, lends itself to uneven heating.

With hot-water heating, there is no noticeable difference in temperature between the floor and the breathing level: the feet, the head and the body all sense the same temperature.

Also in baseboard heating, the air circulation is gentle and does not have the velocity of forced hot air blowing from the register. Not only does that mean temperatures are constant, as opposed to the constant fluctuations associated with forced air systems, but problems with blowing allergens and noisy ducts are eliminated.

Also, since hot-water heat is mild, it doesn't dry the air, so artificial humidifiers are generally not required.

One additional reason for increased comfort is that the gentle circulation of mild air from hot-water baseboards permits objects to attain room temperature, so occupants do not come

in contact with cold chairs.

Baseboards along the outside wall also offers another benefit. When placed along outside walls beneath windows, they act as a barrier against cold drafts, which further helps increase the comfort levels in a room.

For "Fuel Cost Facts," a free pamphlet on fuel cost comparisons listing the amount of BTUs per dollar at various rates for electricity, oil and gas, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to P.O. Box 218, Berkeley Heights, NJ, 07922.

H O M E IMPROVEMENT

Batten down the hatches, bundle up the house... and listen to the warm. Winter's on the way. Fall is the best time to get the house ready to do battle with the winds, rains and snows of winter. Routine maintenance now can mean a saving on energy costs later. Within that backdrop, we've selected "Keep the Home Fires Burning" as the theme for this special fall home improvement guide. Inside you'll find a variety of original stories with tips for keeping your family toasty warm when Ol' Man Winter blows in.

O&E assistant managing editor Bob Sklar, with assistance from Entertainment/Taste editor Keely Wygonik, oversaw this special section, appearing today in all 12 editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. O&E creative services supervisor Glenn Merillat designed the cover. O&E sales representatives Lisa Becker and Joan Hines coordinated advertising. Copley News Service contributed background material. Direct queries to Bob Sklar: 953-2113.

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