

Proper insulation makes your home more comfortable

(NAPS) — One of the easiest ways to make your house more comfortable and increase its resale value is often the one that's most overlooked.

Know what it is? It's the most preferred insulation on the market today.

It's fiber glass and contractors say it offers a wealth of energy efficient benefits. It is also thermally efficient, non-combustible and it won't settle or deteriorate with age.

Whether you're remodeling a family area or building an addition, insulation can be the most important ingredient in making that room more comfortable. There's also a payback as it is relatively inexpensive and will improve your home's energy efficiency by lowering monthly utility bills.

Maintaining proper insulation can also make your home more attractive to potential buyers. In fact, most buyers list energy-efficiency as a prime consideration. The reason? Buyers know they can buy a more expensive home if heating and cooling bills can be kept down.

When adding insulation, it's impor-

tant to look at the attic, sidewalls and the crawlspaces in your floor or garage.

Here are a few suggestions:

■ First, use a ruler in your attic to measure the amount of insulation currently installed. If you have six inches or less, you need more.

■ To check sidewalls press your hand on the wall. If it feels cold in the winter and hot in the summer, it may need more insulation.

■ Check under the floors and in unheated spaces. If the floor above feels cold to bare feet in the winter, adding insulation will make the room more comfortable.

Whether you are doing the work yourself or through a contractor, it pays to familiarize yourself with all the recommended R-values for your region and insulate accordingly.

For a free booklet: *A Guide to Selecting Fiber Glass Insulation Products for New Home Construction and Remodeling*, write North American Insulation Manufacturers Association, 44 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 310, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Adopt-a-pet



Smokey: This 2-year-old male Labrador Retriever is in great shape. Smokey would be a great "personal trainer" for the runner or walker. He is also smart and knows some tricks. Very friendly, this boy would make a great family pet — he can get along with all sorts of personalities and he loves people. Smokey (No. R69244) and other pets are available at the Michigan Humane Society Rochester Hills Shelter, 3600 Auburn Road, (810) 862-7420.

Ceramic tile durable, not maintenance-free

Ceramic tile is an attractive and durable material that is especially popular above bathtubs and inside showers. It's so popular that alternative surface materials are often offered in styles that imitate the look of the real thing.

However, tiles aren't maintenance-free. When problems arise, you'll have two simple choices. You can fix them now, for a few dollars, or you can fix them later, for hundreds more. Once water penetrates the tile grout, wall damage can be extensive.

The problems almost always begin with damaged grout joints, and for one of two reasons. In today's housing market, installers need to move through a job quickly. The problem is that tilework resists speed with two obstacles. The first is that tile mastic cures too slowly, the second is that grout cures too quickly.

The mastic used to glue tile to walls will set in a day, but takes days longer to cure. If the spaces between the tiles are grouted too soon, the gases that must escape in curing create tiny pinholes in the grout.

As for curing the grout, the best approach is a wet cure, where the normal drying rate is prolonged. When cured properly, the grout becomes hard and water resistant. If allowed to dry too quickly, the grout will have a soft, chalky surface that absorbs water. As the water is absorbed, the grout swells, fractures and falls away. In either case, water reaches the drywall behind the tiles and destroys it.

How do you know when your ceramic tiles need help? To begin, look for discoloration in the grout. Dark spots in grout suggest that water is penetrating, either because of pinhole openings or because the grout is loose.

As water penetrates these gaps, molds grow in them, holding more water and further weakening the grout in those areas. Where water mineral levels are high, the dark spots will be surrounded by lighter, yellow-orange discolorations. Of course, if small strips of grout have already fallen out, you'll have little time to waste.

You should also closely examine the caulked seams in the corners and where tiles meet the tub. Where you find spots of dark discoloration or cracks, a repair is in order.

Before you can regrout and recaulk, you must properly prepare the tiles. Use a carpet knife to remove any loose or degraded grout and caulk. Dig out grout a few inches on either side of a discoloration, and extended openings where grout may have already fallen out. Remove discolored and cracked caulk with a sharp knife or razor-type

scraper. Simply cut along each edge of the caulk seam. This will loosen the caulk so that you can pull it away in strips.

With the damaged grout and caulk removed, clean the entire surface thoroughly so that new grout, caulk and sealer can adhere properly. Any of the tub and tile cleaners on the market will work.

If you prefer a home remedy, try a formulation consisting of one-half cup of household ammonia, one-half cup of white vinegar and one-fourth cup of baking soda. Use a toothbrush and tile cleaner or diluted household bleach to scrub persistent stains.

Rinse, allow to dry and wipe away any cleanser residue with a dry cloth. By Popular Mechanics for AP Special Features

Copper plumbing will last for many years

(NAPS) — Homeowners with copper plumbing correctly believe their piping is the one thing they never have to think about. Why? Because except for highly unusual circumstances — copper simply lasts for scores of years.

Before you make a hasty decision based on what appears to be a lower installation fee, ask the following questions before you buy, build or remodel

your own house.

■ Does your plumbing material have long-term, proven performance?

■ Can harmful substances penetrate its walls?

■ Are the joints reliable? Will they withstand rapid pressure and temperature changes?

■ Will it perform equally well in hot and cold weather? Is it easily thawed, if

necessary?

■ Does it resist punctures and abrasion and not embrittle with age?

■ Can it inhibit the breeding of germs?

■ Does it burn, or give off smoke or toxic fumes when exposed to fire?

■ Does it have a low lifetime cost, with virtually no maintenance?

■ Are other homeowners confident

about it; will it increase the home's investment and resale value?

■ Does it have widespread approval of building inspectors and engineers?

■ Does it have inherent quality and value, or is it false economy?

Copper is the only plumbing material that can answer "yes" to all these questions. Call the Copper Development Association at (800) 741-6823.