

Building Scene

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Keeping warm air in and cold air out has become a much more involved process than it used to be. Rofied insulation has been augmented by insulated

sheathing (shown here), house wraps, blown-in insulation, exterior insulation wall systems and even pre-fabricated insulated panels.

Insulation takes a new look in battle against cold, heat

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

When you say insulation, what comes to mind? A pink or yellow roll of fiberglass? Maybe some blown-in or loose-fill insulation? If you're really a student, maybe an expanded polystyrene board.

In the never-stagnant building environment, insulation has moved well beyond these basics. But few ever peel back the outer layers of a home or building and peer beneath.

Almost anything in a home today can be considered insulating, but the nuts and bolts insulation — the wraps, the blowing, the modular wall panels, the polystyrene panels — forms the first line of defense to both cold and heat loss.

INSULATIVE SHEATHING is a strengthened, expanded polystyrene foam applied to the outer frame of the building, said Simplex Products Division spokesman Gerald Gassman. Insulative sheathing serves as a base for an exterior covering, is a fairly common insulative material, but has been improved in recent years, he said.

Sheathing provides insulative value in three ways, Gassman said. One, it has an intrinsic insulative value; two, it seals seams and openings in walls; and three, when properly installed, it has a reflective value.

"The sheathing is actually set away from the wall — about three-quarters of an inch — and that reflects heat back into the house like a Thermos bottle reflects heat back into a bottle," Gassman said.

Insulative sheathing comes in rigid panels that also add strength to a wall to prevent bowing, cracking and warping, Gassman said. Finally, insulative sheathing adds to a house's fire wall rating, he said.

ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE offers not only insulation but a finished appearance as well, said Ward Pimley, spokesman for Dryvit Systems Inc., the leading manufacturer of "outsulation."

Dryvit is marketed locally by Jarecki Distribution Inc. in Plymouth.

Unlike other types of insulation, outsulation is a finished wall, Pimley said. Others require an exterior brick, stone, or siding finish, but outsulation requires no additional covering.

With exterior wall and insulation systems, an acrylic top coat is applied over reinforced mesh layered with fine Portland cement, which is applied over an expanded polystyrene foam base, Pimley said.

Besides adding insulation value to a home, outsulation also comes in a virtually unlimited supply of colors and textures and can be carved to resemble columns, brick work and other features, Pimley said.

THERE ARE several advantages to outsulation, he said. "First, it places the insulation on the exterior where it does the most good."

A key advantage is that outsulation minimizes thermal shock. In the typical wall, cold air infiltrates the wall in the winter, and warm air builds up in the wall in the summer.

In a wall fitted with the exterior wall and insulation system, heat is stored in the wall in the winter and outside heat is deflected in the summer. The cost of heating and cooling is much lower, he said.

Outsulation, which is seamless, also seals thermal bridges and prevents air infiltration as well as sealing out the elements, Pimley said. Conventional wall absorb water and over a period of time, walls buckle or warp and insulation value is lost.

ANOTHER OPTION is the preassembled stress skin, structural panels. Although available for nearly 20 years, they are only beginning to catch on among the nation's builders, said Tom Savoy, technical director at AFM Corp. in Minnesota.

AFM, with plants throughout the country, including in Grand Rapids, builds the preassembled insulated panel, which is essentially a rigid expanded polystyrene board sandwiched between stranded lumber — particle or chip board — facings, he said.

Preassembled stress skin, structural panels — which come in anywhere from 4-by-8 to 8-by-20 foot panels — offer strength similar to a continuous column and do not require wood studs.

Instead, the panels are connected by studs in channels at the top and bottom and between panels by overlapping joints "like blocks sliding into place," Savoy said.

"Once a house is done and the sheathing is put up, you can't tell the difference."

THE SOLID construction prevents bending, twisting and warping, he said, which gives the wall greater strength and thermal stability because there is less settling and shifting.

Also, because the wall is preassembled — rather than building wall sections, standing them up, connecting them and adding insulation — homes are closed up within hours, he said.

And because the stress skin structural panels are connected with overlapping "thermal splicing," air infiltration is cut dramatically. The tighter home is far more energy efficient.

HOUSEWRAPS, an air filtration barrier, serve a similar purpose to the moisture blocking paper of the past, but today's synthetic plastic wraps are far better, Gassman said.

Housewraps literally wrap around a home to keep air from seeping through cracks and seams. Although housewraps have no insulation value in themselves, they do help keep a home energy efficient.

"Even under 10 mph wind conditions, the average insulated wall will allow air seepage through small cracks and seams — and that reduces a home's energy efficiency," Gassman said.

Housewraps also block ultra-violet rays that degrade the older moisture barriers, he said.

WHILE NOT a problem if a house is closed up and the exterior walls are covered with brick or another type of siding, some projects — especially do-it-yourself cabins or second houses — may have to stand up to the elements for months.

Moisture barriers will break down and allow water and condensation to damage the wood beneath; ultra-violet ray-resistant housewraps do not break down, Gassman said.

Finally, housewraps allow moisture to escape from within walls to the outside without allowing cold or hot air from outside to enter, he said.

Security vs. liability

Our association is considering getting a master key instead of a key lock box. What do you think? With the increase in the amount of liability the association is incurring with respect to security, it is my recommendation that the association not have a master key for all the units but have a visual key lock box whereby there are individual keys for individual units.

If the master key is lost, you have placed all the units in jeopardy, whereas an individual loss of a key results only in changing the locks on that particular unit.

Of course, you will want to investigate the question of whether the association wants to retain access to any units under any circumstances, particularly if they have the right to gain access to the unit in case of an emergency in the condominium documents.

I also recommend that the co-owners have dead-bolts to enhance security.

I am planning to develop a condominium near a golf course. Are there any suggestions that you would have with respect to this undertaking, particularly in this setting that I am describing?

The item that was recently discussed at the community associations institute seminar was a failure on the part of the developer to disclose the statement, which, in your case, would include the fact that there is a possibility of errant golf balls on the condominium premises.

Some courts have held that associations are responsible for dangerous conditions being established because of the proximity of the condominium to the golf course.

I would also be concerned about the drainage of the condominium as a physical matter in connection with the golf course waters, although I presume that your site engineer has looked into this matter thoroughly.

Drainage is one of the largest causes of construc-



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queries

Robert M.
Meisner

tion defect legislation in a condominium project both in Michigan and around the country.

Our condominium is large enough to consider hiring an in-house security guard. Do you have any recommendations?

In comparing in-house security guards to the alternatives, including outside guard services, it is my recommendation that you hire outside security and that you pay a sufficient wage to get top quality personnel.

Believe it or not, some security guards are paid as little as \$6 or \$7 an hour. I am told by people in the industry this makes it extremely difficult for them to hire a trained person.

The reason that you want to get an outside guard service is that it would be independently insured and have direct supervisory control over its personnel.

Therefore in the event of a lapse in security or an "inside" job, you will have recourse against the outside security company.

Robert M. Meisner is a Birmingham attorney specializing in condominiums, real estate and corporate law.

You are invited to submit topics that you would like to see discussed in this column by writing Robert M. Meisner at 30200 Telegraph Road, Suite 467, Birmingham 48010.

This column provides general information and should not be construed as legal opinion.

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Common problems plague exteriors

A successful house exterior starts with an honest assessment. According to Remodeling Ideas magazine, most homes in need of help suffer from one of these problems:

- Not enough detail: A house without interesting architectural details is rarely memorable. Details can be added with shutters, window boxes, trim, moldings or other new features. Use paint to accent present detailing.

- Too much detail: Some houses mix too many materials and styles. Take such houses back to basics. Strip away odd-ball elements. Paint mismatched material the same color, or invest in unified cladding.

- Poor proportions: Use landscaping tricks or a new color scheme to shape up a house with awkward lines. Consider dormers, porches or a new entry to balance the exterior.

- As architectural details are added and subtracted, go for a look that's consistent with the basic lines, age and setting of the house.

- To help visualize the changes, try this: Enlarge a photo of the house's exterior, then put tracing paper over the top. Trace the house, then sketch in features that are being considered.

CLADDING a house with new materials may be the best choice if the old exterior is unattractive, mismatched, or if an all-new look is wanted. Choices include:

- Wood siding: Beveled wood siding, especially narrow clapboard, is still the look of tradition. For a contemporary look, use a top grade of cedar or redwood and stain it.

- Synthetic siding: Vinyl or aluminum sidings mimic the look of wood, sometimes very well.

- Consider leaving special window or door trims exposed so character isn't sacrificed. Or, have trim custom-clad with aluminum that's molded to fit on-site. To add detail, ask about special trims for windows, doors and eaves.

- Wood shakes and shingles: Shakes are rough-hewn for a more rustic look. Shingles are cut smoother; trim siding with fancy-cut shingles for a Victorian flavor.

- Brick and stone veneers: These are premium products, and they denote long-lasting quality. They can be applied only on the front, or around the entire house.

- Stucco: This mixture of cement, sand and water makes the look of many Southwestern, Tudor and contemporary houses. New stucco systems not only refinish a house but insulate it, too.