

Be Green

Winterize your home

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http://www.cbc.ca/newsatsixmontreal/begreen/2008/10/winterize_your_home.html



Remember this?

Freaking terrifying, but winter's coming back. And while it's all very well to look like Kenny from South Park when you're outdoors, indoors SHOULD be a little easier on the system, no? At the same time (Hydro bill firmly in focus) we don't want to overheat. So how to strike that balance (and tip the scales in favour of our pocket books)? You need a guide to adjustments that are cheap, easy and accessible even to renters.



And that's where Christopher Sweetnam-Holmes comes in. He co-owns a neat company called Ecocite and builds eco-friendly and sustainable housing. So here are Chris's tips:



1. **Plastic Shrink Wrap:** This is a Montreal staple. I would easily run out of fingers and toes if I tried to count the number of winter dinners I've been to in apartments that are plastered with this stuff. But do you know **THE TRICK?** Because there's a way to use shrink wrap so it not only stops drafts but also acts as an insulator. So for a few bucks you could go from having crappy 100-year-old-and-never-been-renovated windows to pretty efficient kinda-sorta triple-paned windows.

And it's easy.



You've got to position the shrink wrap as close to the window as possible without actually touching it. Too close and touching and you lose any insulation. Too far and the air between the pane and the plastic starts to circulate and conduct the cold.

2. **Caulking around the baseboards:** Again, an under \$20 investment. Caulking is a putty-like substance. It's a mix of chemicals that hardens on contact with air. **You absolutely want to buy a brand that's low in VOCs or Volatile Organic Compounds.** This means that a whole bunch of nasty chemicals don't immediately head for your nasal passages when you uncork the tube.



You want to put caulking all the way along the baseboards in rooms with exposed walls. What that means is: any wall whose outer surface is exposed to winds (and not walls that separate two rooms or apartments). Run caulking along the crack between the floor and the wall and you'll seal a goodly portion of your leaks and drafts. You can also do this under window ledges if you think they might be leaking.

3. **Get an electric thermostat:** It doesn't even have to be one of those programmable ones (although those rock too). Programmable thermostats are best suited to folks who have predictable schedules (which rules out mad media types like me... sigh). But even a regular non-programmable electric thermostat is going to save you mucho dinero. I'll explain: The older thermostats are mechanical. Which means that they're a lot less sensitive and efficient than the newer ones. What tends to happen with the old ones is that temperatures usually have to rise way past what you've set it at to trip it. Ditto the cold. So you tend to have wild (and uncomfortable) temperature fluctuations that waste a lot of energy.



Instead, a super sensitive electric thermostat will keep temperatures where you want them. By the way, here's HydroQuebec's guide to efficient heating:

RECOMMENDED TEMPS:

Night: 17 degrees

Day (out): 17 degrees

Day (in): 20 degrees

Oh, and if you're concerned about the price of replacing all those thermostats, don't worry: HydroQuebec is going to cut you a deal. You can buy a non-programmable thermostat for about \$30 at the hardware store and then, there's this:

HYDRO-QUEBEC REBATES

*** \$45 for 5 thermostats**

*** \$10 for the 6th thermostat**

*** \$10 for the 7th thermostat**

Oh, and I have even better news if you're a renter or live in a senior's residence AND you need an electrician to install them:

*** \$90 for five thermostats**

*** \$20 for each additional thermostat**

Homeowners, Hydro will also subsidize the installations of your thermostat by a master electrician for up to \$65. You can read more about this on their website. Cool, no? Or maybe I mean warm?

And if, like me, you hate mail-in rebates and never actually get around to sending them in, make sure you shop at one of the participating hardware stores for an instant rebate.

Now that you've effectively winterized, perhaps you're considering other green home renovations?

Well, make sure you get some money back! Hydro has some helpful grants and rebates for you here.

Here's a taste of what's out there:

- * \$60 for swapping your energy-guzzling fridge for an EnergyStar one.
- * \$130 in thermostat rebates and electrician fees
- * \$25 for energy efficient lighting
- * Up to \$125 for energy efficient appliances
- * Renoclimat: A grant program if you're undertaking big renovations
- * Money for efficient motors and even farm equipment

So now I want to hear from you: what simple, cost-efficient methods are you using to winterize your home? Leave me a comment or call our talkback line: (514) 597-5626