

# Heat is on: Tips on cutting costs this winter

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM  
Special to the Record-Eagle

While most of us haven't directly felt the recent devastation of Hurricane Katrina, perhaps the worst natural disaster in American history, we will feel the after effects with heating costs this winter.

The primary driver of anticipated high prices for gas, oil and electric heat from December 2005 through the winter of 2006 is uncertainty of the hurricane's effect on oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico, coupled with increased electricity usage due to this past summer's warm weather.

One thing that is for certain is that the steadily rising costs of world oil production will have a dramatic effect this year on the cost of heating your home.

Locally, those who work in different facets of the home heating industry confirm that they have already seen a greater than usual amount of requests and calls from customers looking to be proactive in ways to maximize energy efficiency and keep their costs for doing so as low as possible.

Mike Deschler, the Vice President of Astro Building Products in Traverse City, says one of the major services his company provides are products designed to eliminate the loss of heat through doors and windows, some of which can be very inexpensive and easy to deal with.

"You can lose a substantial amount of heat through doors and windows, and this is the

time of year to replace them if they're worn out, outdated, or not functioning like they should," Deschler said. "Often, you can tell by something as simple as putting your hand up to feel a draft, or simply looking. If you can see light around a door or window surface, you're probably losing heat."

For both, Astro carries everything from basic weatherstripping supplies to quality storm and new doors and windows. In general, Deschler that storm products are a good value by giving an extra air space and keeping wind from the primary surface. While a new door could run around \$200, a storm door costs between \$70-\$120. However, weather stripping products are also quite effective for doors and windows, and can start at about 20 or 30 cents per foot.

"That's a very inexpensive way to make a difference," he said, "because around \$20 worth can make quite an impact. One of our employees here, though, put in new storm windows and doors last year, and he figured that he saved about \$70 a month on his heating bill. It may take a while for the payback, but heating costs will only continue to go up, and they also help keep the house cool in the summer."

At Northern Paradise in Traverse City, salesperson Amy Eickenroth says that this year, their line of direct vent, built in, or insert stoves and fireplaces seem to be more popular than ever, something

she believes is in direct response to the expected rise in heating prices.

"Heating by wood isn't just a great aesthetic for the home and one of the most traditional ways to warm a house, it's a very efficient way to heat," said Eickenroth. "Gas stoves and fireplaces are also a very convenient way to go, and we've found that with many of our customers, once they've had that in a home, they won't have one without it."

Most consumers are familiar with the advantages of both wood burning and gas stoves and fireplaces, but many are just beginning to learn about inserts, according to Eickenroth. As the name suggests, inserts are placed inside an existing heating unit to create greater efficiency by forcing the heat back out through a blower. The upgrade this provides can make a "considerable impact," Eickenroth said.

"I think wood stoves will always be in demand, even though a lot of people looking at buying a first stove ask about and opt for gas. We've found that most of our customers come in after having done their homework on the Internet, and every year, people seem much more knowledgeable about what they're interested in and what will work best for them."

Another Traverse City business offering a wide range of home heating options and solutions is Fireside, Hearth and Leisure, which opened its doors on US 31 South this past May. Owner Ken Smith

has worked in the industry since 1987, and concurs with Eickenroth that clients are not only better informed before coming in, but are also willing to systems like pellet stoves.

"Pellet heating has really caught on as an alternative fuel source because it's very efficient, is much cheaper and easier to work with than wood, and gives you much more control over how much heat you generate," Smith said. "It burns cleaner, and can even be attached to a thermostat. It's a great option for people who are allergic to wood, though there will always be those die-hard wood stove fans and there's a reason that's been around as long as it has."

The pellets themselves look much like rabbit food, and come in 40-pound bags that feed a hopper that holds 60 pounds. The system, attached to either a stove or thermostat, is self-igniting, but it's greatest appeal, says Smith, is in the direct impact it has on making a home more fuel-efficient.

"We offer a wide range of products that can fit almost anyone's budget, along with a full line of service and installation, which is what the customer wants," he said.

"Everyone is interested in saving on their heat bills, and there are some really good means to do that. Do a little homework, and talk with people in the business who know their products well, and you'll find a system that works for you."

## Other warm ways to heat up home

Not everything home owners do for warmth revolves around greater fuel efficiency, energy conservation, and minimizing what is expected, for winter 2005-06, to be the highest cost heating costs ever.

There are some creative and simple ways to "warm" up a home and its inhabitants, and in a way that's also aesthetically pleasing. One of the first steps should be to dress yourself, and then your house, with clothing, fabrics and decorative accessories that maximize what your primary heating source does.

Jamie Gothard, sales representative at Outdoor Adventures Down Outlet in Acme, says that from the body to the bedroom or living room, down-filled products are a time-tested staple for extra warmth. Outdoor Adventures carries a wide range of down products, including comforters, pillows, robes and booties, along with wool sweaters, socks, jackets, vests and much more.

"Down is what geese use to keep warm in winter, and its insulating properties are just superb," she said. "It's probably the best and most comfortable way for your body to retain

warmth, and most people prefer it to wool."

Gothard suggests that a good pair of booties or slippers, perhaps worn with thicker, quality socks are the best means for keeping your feet warm, which plays a critical role in how the body keeps a comfortable temperature. Layering is next, especially if done with effective, natural fibers.

"We all look at how our thermos or stove is running, and sometimes forget about how we're dressed," she said. "A pair of slippers, a nice afghan throw, or the right comforter on your bed at night can be just as important."

When it comes to dressing your home for the long, hard winter ahead, interior design experts say that there are simple touches that can both suggest and create warmth.

Make sure there are extra afghans and throws available for those wishing to settle down with a good book or to watch TV, as well as in the bedroom.

Moving furniture into a closer formation or closer to a fireplace or wood stove creates intimacy — and warmth.

— Nancy Sundstrom

BY MORRIS AND JAMES CAREY  
The Associated Press

**Q: How do I ensure that the contractor I hire will complete the job, and how much more will it cost me? — Heide**

**A:** There is only one method that will absolutely guarantee the completion of your home improvement in the event that your contractor fails: a performance bond. Performance bond is simply an insurance policy in the amount of your construction contract, purchased by you (costs about 4 percent of the contract amount), and is secured by the contractor's assets and past performance record. It is difficult for non-reputable home improvement contractors to get bonding because the criteria to acquire one is very stringent. Don't confuse the performance bond with a contractor's license bond. They aren't the same.

### HOME FACTS

#### Fireproofing your home

Prevention is the key to protecting your home from potential fire hazards.



- Have your chimney inspected and cleaned annually by a certified specialist.
- Remove branches hanging above or around the chimney.
- Use fire-resistant and protective roofing and materials such as stone, brick and metal.
- Keep roofs and eaves debris free.
- Cover all exterior vents, attics and eaves with metal mesh screens no larger than 6 mm.
- Install multipane windows, tempered safety glass or fireproof shutters to protect windows from radiant heat.
- Keep tools for fire protection nearby, i.e. garden hose, shovel, rake, ladder and buckets.
- Trim grass on a regular basis up to 100 feet surrounding your home and trees and brush within 30 feet.
- Landscape your property with fire-resistant plants and vegetation to prevent fire from spreading quickly.

SOURCE: U.S. Fire Administration  
Copley News Service / Paul Hor

## GARDEN TIP

### Give seeds a chance

Deadheading the garden is removing old faded flowers before the plant has the time to produce seeds.

■ The best time to dead head is within a few days after the blooming is over.

■ Deadheading can also help prevent some plants from reseeding all over the garden. Deadheaded flowers can be added to the compost pile or they can be tossed around the base of the plant.

#### TO DEAD HEAD:

■ Cut off the whole flower and usually the whole stem it was growing on. If the stem is thin or weak, you can just snap it or pinch it off. If it is too sturdy, then it should be cut off with a pruning tool or knife.

■ Roses and spireas are two common plants that will often re-bloom if they are deadheaded soon after blooming.



These seed-producing flowers benefited from a dead head.



Plumbing • Heating • In Floor • Air Conditioning

## PRECISION PLUMBING & HEATING Systems, Inc.

Do You Want To...

- **SAVE** on **FUEL COSTS?**
- Breathe **CLEANER AIR** for **BETTER HEALTH?**

**We'll help you BREATHE EASY and SAVE \$\$\$!**

**Call Anytime!**  
Available **7 Days a Week** for Estimates  
**24 Hour Service**

**231-947-0100**

Trane Cash Back Days Are Here!



As seen on Trading Spaces!

her favorite shade is cha cha red.





**NEST**  
FINE FURNISHINGS & ACCESSORIES

Fine Furnishings & Accessories  
Downtown Traverse City  
218 E. Front Street • 231.946.0232

10/11.819259.htm

Even when the children are quiet, your home still speaks.

We understand the language.

CARPET | WOOD | TILE | GRANITE | LAMINATE | VINYL | AREA RUGS

TRAVERSE CITY (231) 946-3661 (800) 946-3661 South Airport & Barlow

ELK RAPIDS (231) 264-5532 (800) 264-5532 127 Ames Street

**Floor Covering Brokers**  
Design Center  
Everyone Welcome  
www.floorcoveringbrokers.com

SINCE 1986

Residential & Commercial Surfaces