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SAVING ENERGY

**An energy checkup
diagnoses heat leaks**

By Jerry Ackerman
Globe Staff

That audit arrived at John and Phyllis Whitmore's house right after breakfast to perform the energy audit, and Phyllis Whitmore, whose 7000 "colonial cottage" in Beverly used \$1850 worth of oil and electricity last year, had her questions ready.

Could he please explain why 2-year-old Christopher's room is so chilly even though it faces south and gets plenty of sunlight?

Should the Whitmores have their walls insulated? And how much would it cost?

Would it make sense for John and Phyllis Whitmore to glass in their back porch as a sunroom? Would this help heat the house?

What about installing a wood stove on the porch?

Should the Whitmores' water heater be using so much electricity?

For the next two hours, Audet explored every room in the house, including the attic and cellar, to answer these questions and more.

He measured windows, checked their fit, peeked inside the walls, examined the foundation for air leaks, and even performed an air-barrier efficiency test.

As he went along, he explained, in simple, understandable language, how a home uses energy as well as how to save it.

In fact, the Mass-Save audit cost for more than \$150.

Mass-Save, however, is a cooperative energy conservation service set up by the state, a federal requirement for gas and electric utility companies to provide this sort of low-cost energy-saving service to every home.

Under national and state standards, utilities commission, the difference is made up from monthly charges, ranging from 50 to 100 cents, added into gas and electric bills respectively.

Owner-occupied homes from one to four living units are eligible for Mass-Save. It 400-632-8300 or, in the hands of areas not covered by the utility companies, by other utility companies, city or town. But in Mass-Save's area, it will refer you to auditors who do service you. Auditors are making evenings and Saturdays as well as on weekdays — and they can be performed at any time of year.

One specific plan for action dealt with the chill in Christopher's second-floor room.

By the time he got up to Christopher's bedroom, Audet had already declared the oil burner in good working order, explained how the basement could be made warmer by backing insulation under some full-length windows whose light really wasn't needed, and suggested how to fix the front stairs door so it would stay shut.

One problem, on the second floor, he determined, was loose-fit frames. When the white lines from the northward and southward around the house, he explained, it creates a slight vacuum on the E side of the house — right outside Christopher's room. That vacuum was literally sucking heat out around the base of the door.

The cure? For a starter, some foam-gasket weatherstripping could be glued around the window sashes where they meet the window frame. They may seem trivial, but they're really not. Audet said the Whitmores in fact had done this elsewhere in the house several times to compensate the job operator. Audet said installing the job should cost approximately \$4.

Then, in the attic, Audet found one more cause for the chill in Christopher's room.

For most unknown reasons, the insulation put in the attic floor by a previous owner did not extend over Christopher's room. Putting more in should make a big difference. Audet suggested it was a do-it-yourself project. Phyllis Whitmore agreed, and shouldn't cost more than \$25 or so.

As for the water heater, Audet said it was the wrong model for the water heater. It would cost just under \$150 to get a new one, but would save the Whitmores about \$90 a year in energy bills. Audet said the new one would last for 10 years.

While their oil burner (the unit under the furnace) was in good condition, they could replace it with an oil-fired, low-pollution, fuel-efficient model that Audet estimated would save \$90 a year in oil costs.

As for weatherstripping both the front and back doors, it'd be \$20 to do it.

The savings plan, Audet agreed, was a good one. The back porch should and close it with double-pane glass. The room should be finished during the day — but it would be a nice surprise. Nevertheless it would make a nice playroom for the kids.

A wood stove on the porch, however, was not a good idea. Audet said the rest of the house was too hot, because of the air that would be lost out. Needless to say, the Whitmores have decided to do it.

Phyllis Whitmore was pleased with what she got, and later said, "I thought he was very professional. He pointed out a lot of things that had been on my mind over the past year," she said. And while the auspicious project may not be a white unicorn, it is a quality way to plan for making Christopher's room warmer. She will celebrate spring by putting in the extra attic insulation and the window weatherstripping she said.

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