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Insulation firms hurt by supply

BY TERRY MCCARTHY
Area companies specializing in the installation of home insulation are ambivalent about the prospects of another frigid New England winter.
A survey of area businesses showed that while demand is unusually high for insulation materials this year, on-hand supplies are low.
"We have been very busy lately," Pat White of the Capital Insulation Co., Inc., West Springfield, said, "but material is hard to get, there is quite a backlog of orders now."
White gave two reasons for the unusually high demand this year. She said that persons were forewarned of the possibility of a cold winter by last year's below-average temperatures. Also given as a reason was the possibility of President Carter's energy plan being approved by Congress. Part of that plan calls for a rebate to homeowners installing insulation as an energy-saving measure.

All scarce
The most commonly used insulation materials are fiberglass, rock wool and cellulose, Ms. White said. All are scarce, she added.
A spokesman for A C and S Insulators, 11 Keeler Ave., Chicopee, said that the normal lead time for ordering material is 30 days. It now takes months for businesses to receive their

orders, he said.
"I feel sorry for the people in the home insulation business," he said. "They are all waiting for material. They just can't keep up with the demand."
A spokesman for the Zonolite Division of the W. R. Grace Co., Easthampton, which supplies insulation materials to area companies, said, "They can't make it fast enough."
The Reddy Oil Co., 81 North Bridge, uses equipment that blows foam insulation into wall cavities. There is no shortage of the chemical foam, company president Roger J. Reidy said.
"Our business is going great guns," he said. Materials other than the foam that is used in 70 per cent of Reidy's business are "very hard to get," Reidy added. He added that a truckload of insulation material used to be able to be ordered on "a week's notice." It now can take months, he said.
Why is demand unusually high this year?
Trying to save
"People are probably trying to

compensate for the rising cost of energy," he said. "They are trying to save a buck."
According to Reidy, many homeowners now have some insulation in their attics. Most of the requests for insulation this fall have been for wall cavities, he said.
Some homeowners, once they obtain the scarce insulation material, opt to install the insulation themselves.
Reidy said that sometimes, "he pushes people to do their own work."
Holyoke Fire Department Fire Prevention Officer Douglas Moran warned homeowners who plan to do their own work to make sure the material used is fire resistant. A nationwide study recently showed that disreputable companies and amateur insulators have installed potentially flammable materials into the wall cavities of homes in some parts of the country. Moran said that he has not heard of any such cases in the Holyoke area.
"It would be a crazy thing to do," he said. "That is where all

your wiring is."
Not enough
Some of those installing their own insulation do not install enough to adequately protect their homes from heat loss, Ms. White said.
"Many homes have only three inches of insulation in their attics. They should have 10 inches," she said.
Ms. White said homes in the area, because of the severity of New England winters, should have insulation with an "R-factor" of R-30. R-factors indicate the materials' resistance to the flow of heat.
"The higher up you go in R-Factor, the better off you are," Ms. White said, adding that "as the R-factor rises so does the price of the material."
Most businessmen contacted agree that the one factor that will ultimately determine how well their businesses will do this winter is the amount of material on hand to cope with the inordinate demand.
As one businessman said, "It is going to get worse before it gets better."

Maine homeowners have worse problems

AUGUSTA, Maine
(UPI)—One of the leading insulation firms in New England says some northern

New Englanders who want to insulate their homes for winter may be out of luck.
Bruce Hathaway, vice president of U.S. Insulation of Scarborough, which insulates about 1,500 homes a year and is the largest insulator in Maine, said recently his firm is having a difficult time getting insulation this year.
Like most firms in the industry, it is fiberglass insulation, supplied in rolls or bats, which the firm is having

trouble acquiring. Cellulose paper and is usually blown into the area to be insulated is still easy to get, Hathaway said.
Larry Hughes, owner of Waterville Insulation Co., of Waterville, said in his 10 years of business this is the first year he has had trouble getting insulation. He supplies about 200 homes a year with insulation within a 75-mile radius of Waterville.
Hughes said he is having

trouble acquiring fiberglass roll insulation, "probably because more construction workers use it in new homes, as well."
Janet Peters, director of a project called "Weatherization," partially funded by the Federal Energy Administration, said the Maine insulation shortage has hurt the project, too.
Aroostook County, Maine's northernmost county, has been hit the worst by the shortage, she said.

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