

RENOVATING FOR ENERGY SAVINGS

Case studies

October 2004 Issue 2



Post-War 1 1/2-Storey Homes

More than one million 1 1/2 storey houses were built in all parts of Canada between 1945 and 1960. In the early post-war years, many of these modest houses had a finished floor area of less than 110 m² (1,200 sq. ft.)

What you've got

- Unfinished basement
- Bedrooms within the roof space
- Living area on main floor

How it's built

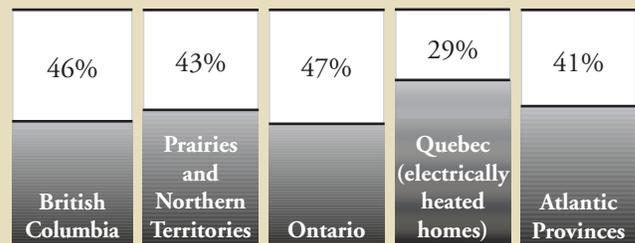
Actual construction details used in your house may differ, and over the years some improvements may have been done.

This is simply a general description:

- Exterior walls: 2 x 4 in. stud walls with up to RSI 2.1 (R-12) batt insulation, older homes could be uninsulated
- Ceiling: insulation RSI 2.1 (R-12) (coastal B.C.) to RSI 4.2 (R-24) in Quebec and Northern Territories; sloped ceiling areas usually same insulation value as walls

POTENTIAL ENERGY SAVINGS

If all of the recommended improvements presented here are carried out, overall energy use can be reduced as shown below. Actual energy use is affected by weather and lifestyle, so specific energy savings may vary. If you, or a previous owner, have already carried out some energy-saving measures, the actual reduction in energy use will differ. The energy savings presented here are based on computer simulations done specifically for this type of house in each Canadian region.



- Windows: double-glazed or single-glazed with storms (except for coastal B.C.)
- Original exterior doors: hollow or solid wood panels
- Foundation: uninsulated poured concrete or concrete block

Improvements can

- Reduce energy use for space heating
- Reduce drafts
- Reduce summer overheating
- Reduce moisture and condensation problems
- Reduce noise from outside the house
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Improve indoor air quality
- Improve humidity levels in dry northern houses
- Increase comfort level

How to select energy-saving improvements for post-war, 1 1/2 storey homes. These improvements will save energy and reduce your heating bills, while making your house more comfortable to live in.

Problems and Opportunities

- Air leakage area is distributed throughout the house, but is often concentrated at the ceiling and the short knee walls on the upper floor. Other areas for air leakage are at the window frames and also around masonry chimneys where they go through the building envelope. If all air leakage paths are combined, the average house of this vintage would have a hole that is about 1,130 cm² (or roughly 13 x 13 in.).
- Older houses do not generally have an effective ventilation system to maintain proper indoor air quality. There may be a noisy bathroom fan and a kitchen range hood fan.
- Many houses from this era still have their original furnace or boiler. If they have been replaced, they will likely be older, low-efficiency equipment that is only about 68 per cent (or less) efficient. Water heating is usually provided by a conventional tank.
- Many 1½-storey homes have had additions such as dormers and closed-in porches added to them. For details on how to reduce heat loss and air leakage in these areas please see #11 in the *Renovating for Energy Savings* series: *Common Additions*.

Draftproof Everywhere!

- Draftproof or air seal the top of foundation walls, around window and door frames, at attic hatches, ceiling penetrations around light fixtures and wiring, and service penetrations through the exterior walls.
- Keep weatherstripping at doors and windows in good condition.

- The major area for air sealing is the ceiling and the knee wall on the upper floor and the edge of the floor platform in the attic.
- Chimneys and flue pipes should have a heat shield installed and sealed to surrounding drywall or framing. An additional heat shield can be installed at the subfloor level.
- All the cracks and gaps in the basement walls and floors should be caulked and sealed.
- Insulate and draftproof the basement header area with expanding spray foam to reduce drafts across the first floor.
- If there is a sump inside the basement, it should have a tight-fitting cover installed.

For details on draftproofing, see *Keeping the Heat In* by Natural Resources Canada.

Space Heating System

Consider replacing your warm-air furnace or boiler with a new high-efficiency unit. Your heating contractor can do a heat loss calculation to properly size the furnace to your home's requirements. If your home has central air conditioning, the new furnace will also have to be matched to the existing A/C unit. In some cases, space and water heating systems can be integrated so that only one boiler or heating unit is required to carry out both tasks.

Increase the efficiency of your forced-air system by sealing ductwork wherever it is easily accessible. Install newer, more accurate thermostats in electrically heated houses.

If you are using the basement as living space, make sure you have adequate supply and return ducting. The original heating system may not have been designed to include the basement.

Improvements that can save energy in 1½-storey homes built in Canada after World War II.

The best time to carry out energy-saving improvements is when you are planning other renovations. Carry out the air sealing and insulation upgrades before you invest in a new heating or mechanical system. A tighter house with better thermal properties has a smaller heating load and a different ventilation requirement. A qualified contractor can help you with this.

A Windows

Energy-efficient windows greatly improve comfort levels, virtually expanding the usable space in the house, as the area near the windows is no longer cold and drafty. Replacing windows can also improve house appearance and increase resale value. The most energy-efficient choice is a high-performance unit with selective glazing (such as double- or triple-glazed units with a low-e coating, argon gas fill and insulating spacers).

Houses built in the 1970s may have aluminum frame “sashless sliders”, (where the glazing sits directly in tracks in the frame). Reduce condensation problems by installing new sliders set in sashes, or adding magnetic storms to the interior or replace the complete unit. These windows are most likely reaching the end of their usable life and should be replaced.

Existing wood-frame windows can be retrofitted using custom, double-glazed units in the original sash. If window repair is required, replacements should be high performance units.

All new windows should be installed with good air sealing practices.

B Basement Floor

Reduce moisture and soil gas concerns in basements by covering dirt floors. If you have a dirt floor, cover it with polyethylene sheets, overlap and tape seams by 300 mm (12 in.) and run the poly 150 mm (6 in.) up the walls. Cover poly with a layer of sand and paver stones or concrete.

C Basement Walls

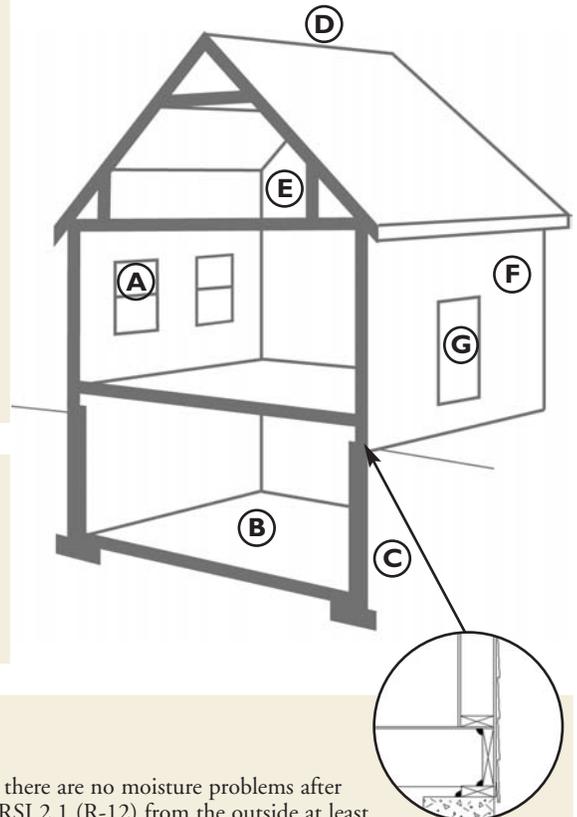
First, make sure foundation walls are in good repair and you have positive drainage so that there are no moisture problems after the walls are insulated. If existing moisture problems cannot be fixed, insulate the walls to RSI 2.1 (R-12) from the outside at least 600 mm (2 ft.) below grade for poured concrete; from top to bottom for concrete block. Always insulate rubble or stone foundations from the outside to avoid possible frost damage to old mortar. If there is no moisture problem in your poured or concrete block foundation, insulate from the inside to RSI 2.1 (R 12) including the header area. The header should also be insulated.

If you are insulating from the inside, most building codes require a moisture barrier on the basement wall, and an air and vapour barrier on the warm side of the insulation. Here are three ways to meet most code requirements:

- A) lay polyethylene sheets or tar paper on the basement wall, build a stud wall with batt insulation and seal the warm side with polyethylene;
- B) use an approved, rigid-board insulation thick enough to give RSI 2.1 (R-12) and finish it with a fire-resistant material (e.g., gypsum board);
- C) lay 25 mm (1 in.) of extruded polystyrene board insulation against the basement wall, build a stud wall with batt insulation and finish with gypsum board.

Headers should have at least RSI 2.1 (R-12) rigid foam friction-fit into each cavity and sealed with caulking or foam-in insulation to reduce air leakage. Blown-in polyurethane foam can also be used.

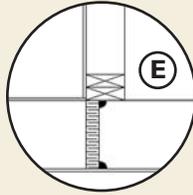
Insulating foundation walls—inside or out—keeps the basement warmer, protecting pipes and ducts from freezing. It is also easier to make a continuous insulation and air barrier at the walls than in the ceiling. Remember that the basement in this vintage house was not built as a living space, and should not be converted into one. Basement dehumidification may still be required in the summer.



D Ceiling/Roof Insulation – Increase to at least:

- RSI 7 (R-40) natural gas or oil space heating
- RSI 9 (R-52) electric space heating
- RSI 5.6 (R-32) in coastal British Columbia

The amount of insulation you can add depends on roof structure and access. An attic space with knee walls can be insulated up the knee wall and in the floor of the side attic spaces, or in the eaves. Either way, it is important to seal the base of the knee wall as shown to stop air leakage.



Remove any older insulating material (wood shavings, sea grass, peat moss, etc.) from the perimeter where eaves limit the amount of insulation. Replace with rigid insulation or new, blown-in material here to increase insulation values.

F Exterior Walls

If you redo the siding on your house, take this opportunity to increase insulation levels and do some air sealing. Insulation can be blown into the wall cavities from the outside. If the wall cavities are already insulated, add a layer of exterior insulation and a house-wrap air barrier. If at the same time, you can replace the windows with better-performing units, the combined retrofit gives your older house a facelift, better energy efficiency and higher levels of comfort while saving you money on labour costs. Obtain a professional contractor's advice on how to approach this retrofit.

G Exterior Doors

Consider replacing older, wooden exterior doors with metal, insulated units, which are more durable, easier to weatherstrip, and maintain their appearance with lower maintenance needs. If you keep the original door, keep the weatherstripping in good condition, upgrade the hardware and block off the mailslot or any other openings as part of your draftproofing measures.

General Energy Efficiency Notes

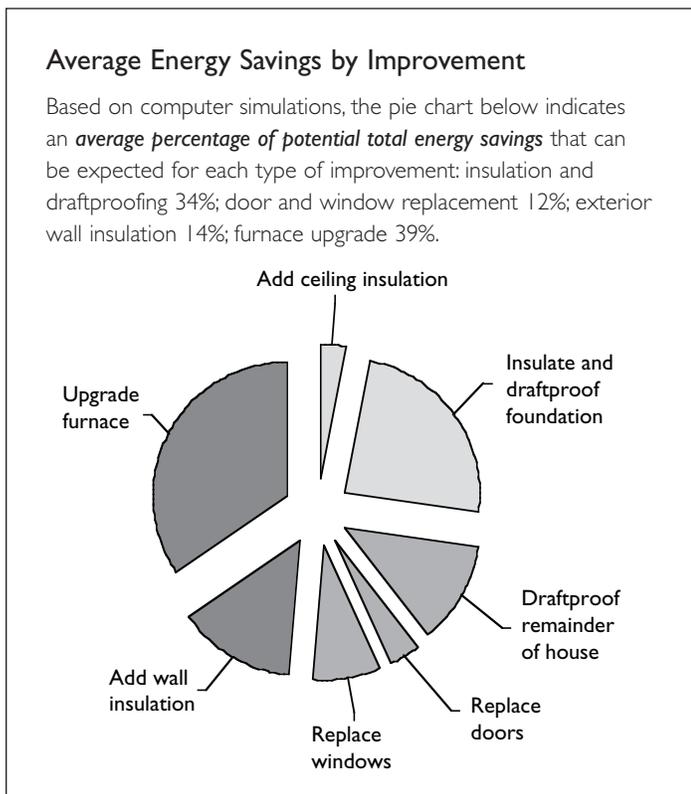
- Cover hot water pipes within 3 m (9 ft.) of the water tank with pipe insulation—and if possible, insulate all accessible hot water pipes.
- Insulate electric hot water tanks with an insulation blanket.
- Install programmable thermostats to lower temperatures at night or during the day when your home is unoccupied: stay at or above 16°C (61F) minimum temperature to prevent condensation and mold problems, and maintain heat in all rooms.
- Replace leaky dampers and repair chimney flues on woodstoves and fireplaces.

- Glass doors on fireplaces will reduce air leakage up the chimney when not in use.
- Consider other options for fireplaces: an electric fireplace insert (no fuel safety issues), EPA-rated insert unit, or convert to a direct-vent natural gas fireplace insert.
- Gas fireplaces: look for direct-vent units with intermittent electronic ignition systems, or other easy means of turning off and relighting the pilot light.
- Replace your old oil- or gas-fired water heater with a side-wall vent unit or a high-efficiency electric water heater. This eliminates the chimney and associated air leakage and backdrafting problems. Check into integrated space and water heating systems (i.e., a boiler for space heating fitted with a “tankless coil” or “indirect heater” that provides domestic hot water). A solar hot water system can produce up to 60 per cent of your annual water heating needs. Solar hot water systems, instantaneous water heaters and other options are becoming more affordable as they become more readily available.
- Before replacing your existing furnace or boiler, carry out any air sealing, draftproofing, insulation upgrades and other energy-saving improvements to the walls, windows and doors—and then give your whole heating system a tune-up.
- **It is important to know how airtight your house is to ensure there is no backdrafting of flue gases into the house when exhaust fans are operating. A combustion safety test, carried out by a qualified contractor, can indicate if depressurization is a potential problem.**
- Control energy loss in the furnace room by installing automatic, motorized duct dampers on the combustion air line. The same can be done on the fresh-air intake of most furnaces. This prevents large amounts of cold air from entering the plenum between firing cycles.
- Oil heating systems are often oversized. Changing to a smaller nozzle size can improve system performance.
- Controlled air change—fresh air in, stale air out—is important for good indoor air quality. If you have a forced-air heating system it may be possible to add a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) to the system. In houses without forced-air heating or fuel-fired equipment, a good quality quiet fan in a central bathroom or hall and an exterior-exhausting range hood fan may be an appropriate option. Your ventilation system should be designed and installed by a qualified technician to ensure that the operation and venting of any combustion appliance in the house is not compromised.

- In the coldest periods of winter, the indoor humidity should be between 30 and 35 per cent to avoid condensation on windows. Invest in a low-cost hygrometer to monitor the relative humidity levels in your home. If winter humidity levels are too high, try increasing your ventilation rate (for example, by running a small bathroom fan continuously).
- When winter humidity levels are low, it is often due to excessive air leakage. Better air sealing will raise humidity and save energy. If, after air sealing work has been completed, there is still a problem with low humidity levels, a humidification system may be required.

Other energy-saving improvements

- Water-saving fixtures: low-flush or dual-flush toilets, faucet and shower flow restricters, front-loading clothes washer that reduce water heating loads.
- Energy-efficient appliances: replace and recycle older refrigerators, freezers, electric ranges and dishwashers with Energy Star® rated models.
- Energy-efficient lighting: the average house has 27 lightbulbs in it. On average, lighting in a house consumes 1,800 kWh annually. Switch to fluorescent, compact fluorescent and task lighting.



Special Health and Safety Considerations		
<i>When you make improvements to your home you change the way it operates. This can affect the health and safety of the house and occupants. Review the following table carefully before carrying out your energy improvements.</i>		
If you do this	It can cause this	Can be solved by this
Draftproof your house	Depressurization by exhaust fans could cause backdrafting of combustion flue gases.	Replace combustion appliances with direct-vent appliances or incorporate make-up air. If there is a fireplace or woodstove, ensure there is adequate venting and that combustion air is available.
Check ventilation	Exhaust-only ventilation can lead to excessive depressurization and spillage of flue gases from combustion equipment. Supply-only ventilation can lead to excessive pressurization and condensation/frost problems.	Have a qualified contractor carry out a depressurization test to determine if a balanced ventilation system is required.
Upgrade the furnace	Higher noise levels if the ducts are not properly sized for the higher airflows.	Size the heating system for both the heating load and existing ducting, seal all exposed ductwork connections to reduce vibration.
Install high-efficiency water heater and furnace	Reduced air-change rate, stuffiness and higher humidity levels because high-efficiency sealed combustion units exhaust very little house air compared to a standard unit with a chimney.	Install a proper ventilation system.
Replace the windows	Increased airtightness can lead to higher humidity levels, resulting in condensation on the windows and other cooler surfaces.	Install a proper ventilation system with automatic humidity control.

CMHC's

Renovating for Energy Savings series

- Issue 1 Pre-World War II Houses
- Issue 2 Post-War 1½-Storey Homes
- Issue 3 Post-1960s Two-Storey Homes
- Issue 4 1960s-70s One-Storey Homes
- Issue 5 Split-Level Homes
- Issue 6 Split-Entry Homes
- Issue 7 Mobile Homes
- Issue 8 Duplexes and Triplexes
- Issue 9 Row Houses
- Issue 10 Homes with Walkout Basements
- Issue 11 Common Additions

Additional Information and Resources

CMHC Canadian Housing Information Centre (CHIC)

- ***Building, Renovating and Maintaining***
www.cmhc.ca/en/co/renoho/index.cfm
- ***About Your House***
www.cmhc.ca/en/co/co_001.cfm

Natural Resources Canada

- **Office of Energy Efficiency**
www.oeenrcan.gc.ca Tel. 1-800-387-2000
- **Publications**
www.oeenrcan.gc.ca/publications/infosource
- **Keeping the Heat In**
www.oeenrcan.gc.ca/keep_heat_in/

Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA)

The impact of specific improvements for your house can also be provided by technicians and qualified trades persons. The Renovation Council of your local Home Builders' Association can provide some references, or contact the CHBA
www.chba.ca Tel. 613-230-3060

- **In Quebec, please contact the APCHQ** (Association provinciale des constructeurs d'habitations du Québec) at www.APCHQ.com tel. 514-353-9960 or **ACQ** (Association de la construction du Québec) at www.ACQ.org Tel. 514-354-0609
- **The Renovation Roadmap**
Web site developed by CHBA, CMHC and NRCAN
www.myhomereno.com

Provincial Governments

Provincial Government departments will frequently provide detailed recommendations for your region.

Local Utilities

Your local energy utility can usually provide detailed recommendations for your region.

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