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## SUNDAY Q&A

# He digs for holes

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It's a good thing if this guy audits you.

You wouldn't just throw money out your window. But if you haven't properly winterized your home, that's exactly what you might be doing. Heat pouring through improperly insulated windows, doors, walls and ceilings means more money pouring out of your wallet. Same goes for the cool escaping in summer. **Marshall Minshew** of Refresh Homes knows all about it. The 40-year-old specializes in energy audits to identify inefficiencies, saving energy and money.

### **Q. Tell us one way air escapes from a house that people don't think about.**

**A.** Well, there's the stack effect. That's warm air rising. If you have a hole in the top of your house, such as a whole-house fan, or a recessed can light, that's a hole in the highest point in your house, and the hot air can go up and through those holes. So the hot air is rising up and out, and there is a pressure balance. Then the cold air is able to push in more easily through openings in the lower portion of your house.

### **We have openings in the lower portion of our houses? How? Where?**

Oh, yes. All around the rim joists and thresholds of doors, even windows on the lower level. Utility penetrations where the gas lines or air conditioning lines come in. There are more holes than people realize. A lot of times they are unaware that those holes are an issue. I can show them that they are.

### **Do you have to spend a lot of money to get your house fixed?**

That depends on what's wrong. If your furnace is 30 years old, that's a chunk of money, but the rate of return on it is pretty good, depending on how inefficient your old unit was. But I am not selling you furnaces or air conditioners. I tell you how inefficient things are and rank them on a priority basis. A lot of people want to do the work themselves.

### **Most common problem?**

Recessed can lights, round lights that are recessed into the ceiling. That's an item that people just don't know is a problem. There's significant air leakage around them. Another big thing is fireplaces. I call them romantic holes in your house. They just lose heat.

### **Do you fix the problems?**

No. I just prioritize what I think should be done first. It gives the homeowner a direction. They may think they need new windows. That may be the case, but more often than not it's not the case.

### **Worst thing you've found?**

I've found houses that didn't have any insulation. Other times I've found houses where people thought they had the walls insulated, but there were cavities that were completely missed.

**How much?**

I charge \$350.

**Will it pay for itself in energy savings?**

Easily. But you also have to factor in comfort. You'll feel better and have a more durable house, and one that is less likely to cause rot and mold.

**How much money can people be losing?**

I saw one house last year that was losing \$800 per year just from air leakage (heating and cooling combined).

**How do you know if you need an audit?**

I haven't found a house yet that couldn't benefit from it.

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