

The Monster Has Moved



Many children fear the monster under the bed; that never seen but always felt threat to comfort. For some homeowners the monster has moved to the attic where it devours comfort and money.

Understandably, these folks dread their high winter heating and summer air conditioning bills. Yet both can be radically reduced with the same solution. The energy envelope of a house begins above the living space. If a house is 3,000 square feet with 2,000 square feet of living space, why pay to heat and cool the 1,000 square feet of attic that you don't live in?

An attic without proper insulation and air sealing not only draws conditioned air from the living space below, it forces heating and cooling systems to work much harder. This means more maintenance and a shorter lifespan for the furnace and HVAC. It also means exorbitant and wasteful spending on precious energy. The sounds of air conditioning repeatedly cycling and the furnace frequently kicking on are the hungry monster growling. Of all the ways that a house uses and loses energy, the attic is by far the most affordable improvement that delivers instant and lasting benefits.

Half of the energy in a typical house is expended conditioning air. That overhead storage space has tremendous impact on heating and cooling efficiency. Energy performance is affected by air leaks, ridge vents, soffit vents, attic fans, recessed lights, pull-down stairs, radiant barriers, ductwork, and HVAC equipment. The most common problems are the absence of a reflective barrier and inadequate insulation. Reflective barriers block solar energy to protect conditioned air in living spaces. Whether due to incorrect or aged material or to improper installation, inadequate insulation allows heated air from rooms below to escape through the attic. This problem is reversed in summer when 140 degree attic heat moves into living space.

Signs of the monster are clear: Icy floors. Drafty areas. Rooms that become uncomfortably hot or cold. The presence of excess moisture or mold. And the strongest evidence--high utility bills. These conditions are caused by a number of factors such as less than 10 inches of insulation, ductwork exposed above insulation, visible attic floor joists, and recessed ceiling lights directly below the attic. The U.S. Dept. of Energy recommends 16 inches of insulation or R-60. Since the attic has colossal influence over the energy efficiency of a house and its operating costs, it makes sense to slay the monster. We have a panther to help.

