

The Comfort Zone

I'm sitting in my house shivering a little and thinking about how I'm going to make my house more comfortable this winter. In the dictionary, comfort is defined as contented well-being. In our home comfort is defined by several factors: air temperature (degrees Fahrenheit, or dry bulb temp.), moisture (relative humidity), surface temperatures, and airflow. All of these factors working together create the *comfort zone*. During the winter we are most comfortable with the thermostat set between 68 -78 degrees, relative humidity around 50%, and air movement minimized.

The dry bulb temperature is easy to control by setting the thermostat. Controlling the humidity can be more difficult. Forced air systems have built in humidifiers. Make sure to engage the humidifier during the winter months. Hot water and electric baseboard systems don't provide any moisture. So, place a few humidifiers in the house to add moisture to the air. Moisture is key to keeping a house comfortable.

Comfort can also be greatly affected by air movement. Some air movement is needed. In fact, a healthy house has a 1 hour air exchange cycle. A drafty house, however, can be unbearable. Seal up the exterior penetrations to minimize draft. Take a walk around the house and identify any areas that let cold air in: doors, windows, roof penetrations, etc. Address these areas and draft will be greatly reduced.

Also, consider surface temperature. Are the floors cold because the basement is unheated? Put some bat. insulation under the floor to warm it up. Are the windows single pain? Get storm windows and lined window treatments. If the house is an old brick house, pull the furniture away from the walls.

I know these things seem elementary, but they all make the house more comfortable and are inexpensive. Do these things this month as the weather get colder and next month will talk about things to do to make your house more energy efficient.