

ATTIC AND RIM JOIST RETROFIT STOPS AIR INFILTRATION, CREATES BIG ENERGY SAVINGS

Background

As energy costs began to increase, many homeowners started searching for more energy efficient building trade tools to use in homes to offset the costs. In response to this trend, a retrofit project began on a 2,300 ft² home in Northeastern Ohio in November, 2008. In conjunction with this retrofit, a blower door test - an EPA Energy Star[®] recognized diagnostic method for measuring air exchanges - was conducted to pinpoint where energy was being lost in the home. This testing was performed by a certified third-party home energy rater accredited by the U.S. Government.



Problem

Upon completion of the blower door test, the homeowner found that the average number of air exchanges in the house was 13.31 per day. The recommended number of air exchanges per day in a house of this size is 7.7. After speaking with an HVAC specialist, the homeowner realized the high amount of air exchanges paralleled the recent high energy bills.

Solution

Handi-Foam[®] Spray Foam was used to seal and insulate the basement rim joist of the home, along with the attic, to stop air loss. Due to its closed cell properties, Handi-Foam[®] creates both an air and vapor retarder. The blower door test was conducted to analyze the air infiltration, air exchanges and energy efficiency. The retrofit application took place in different phases.

Phase 1: The previous blown in fiberglass insulation was removed from the attic and the attic floor was left exposed. Another blower door test was conducted, with results showing an increase in air exchanges from 13.31 to 13.66 or a 2.5% increase. This result means the blown in fiberglass alone made an insignificant difference in preventing air exchanges and stopping air infiltration.

Phase 2: Using the Magnum[™] Heated Hose System, Handi-Foam[®] Spray foam was applied to seal the attic critical seal and thermal bypasses. The critical seal points included pipe penetrations, drywall to wood connections, junction boxes, can lights, soffits, and baffles. A 1" coat of Handi-Foam[®] Spray foam was applied over the entire attic floor to create an airtight critical seal and to stop air infiltration, providing an R-value of 6.2. A blower door test was performed and the air exchanges per day dropped from 13.31 to 9.93 or a 25% decrease, meaning the minimal amount of Handi-Foam[®] Spray foam made a significant difference in preventing air exchanges from entering the house.



Phase 3: Additional insulation was required to meet local building codes' R-value standards. Cellulose was added to the attic and sprayed directly above the foam - a process known as hybrid application. An additional 3" of Handi-Foam[®] Spray Foam was sprayed in the rim joist of the house. A final blower door test was performed and the number of air exchanges dropped to 9.05, which from the start of the project lowered air exchanges by an astounding 32%.

Stopping air infiltration is the best defense against energy leaks. The Department of Energy estimates that up to 40% of energy loss in a home can be contributed to air infiltration. Creating an air barrier is vitally important in rim joists and attics because without it moist air from inside can filter out through fiberglass insulation, creating condensation. This condensation or moisture can eventually lead to mold and mildew problems. This retrofit not only increased the home's energy efficiency significantly, it will also lead to a more comfortable living environment within the house. In January of '09, the average temperature in Northeast Ohio was 28.9°, six degrees colder than January '08, yet the home experienced more than \$200.00 in energy savings.

