



Home Tips®



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Q & A

Attic Access Leaks?

As the winter months come nearer, what can be done to cut our heating bills?

Sealing your home is the single most efficient way to cut those heating bills. Cold winter air can enter around all of the windows, doors and any other openings. Make sure the weather-stripping is air tight and all joints are properly sealed.

Also, make sure you have the proper amount of insulation in the attic and in the floor. Attics should have a minimum of R-30 which is approximately 12" deep for blown fiberglass. Floors over unheated basements or crawl spaces should have R-19 which is 6" of fiberglass batt insulation. Be sure to turn the paper vapor barrier towards the heated area.

One of the most neglected areas for heat loss is through the attic access. Most attic access covers are only made out of 1/4" plywood. This is true for scuttle holes as well as pull down attic stairs.

Pull down stairs should be sealed around the outside of the cover with weather-stripping. The self-adhesive foam will stick directly to the plywood. Build a box to cover the stair opening out of 3 to 4 layers of 1/2" foam sheathing or cover across the opening with a fiberglass insulation blanket.

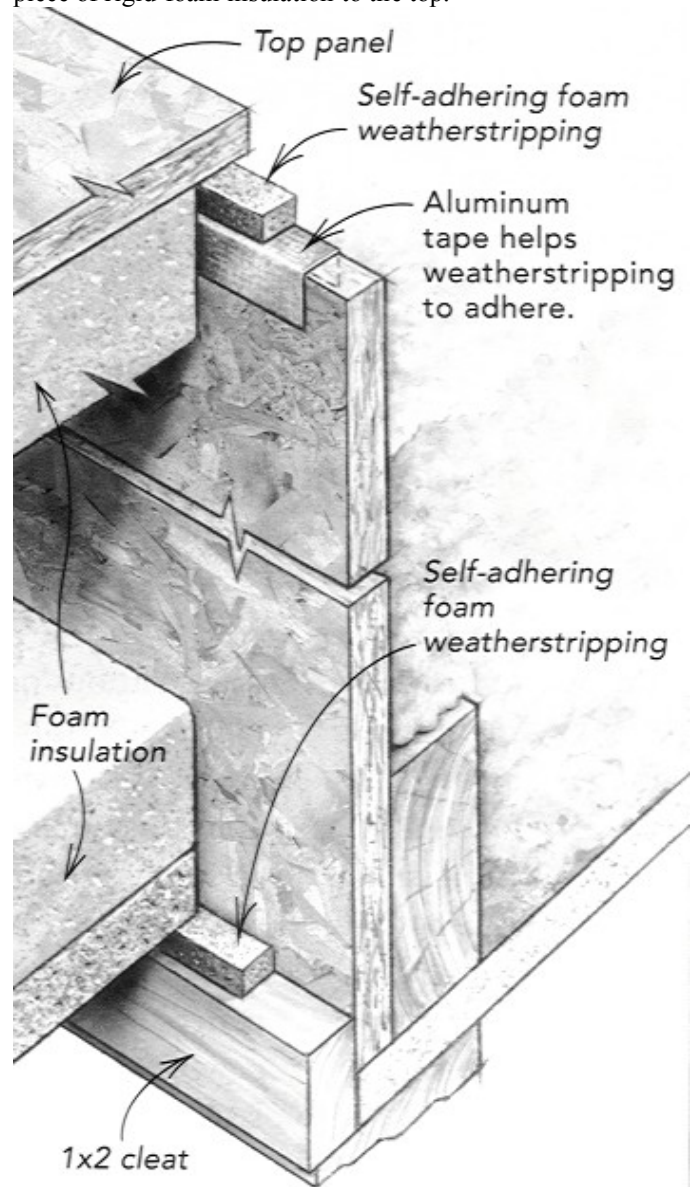
If you have a scuttle hole, you can build a double insulated box to trap the air. Start by making a shaft box that acts as an insulation dam and supports the hatches. Size the shaft box to fit over the existing opening (see drawing).

Make the sides at least 16" tall to hold back the attic insulation. There's no need to make the shaft out of anything fancy, just as long as it's solid. You can usually find several pieces of oriented strand board (OSB) or plywood sheathing in contractor's scrap piles that need only to have the edges dressed up and to be cut to size.

Making the shaft 16" deep gives the space to install two insulated hatches and provides maneuvering room to remove or replace the bottom hatch. The top panel is larger than the shaft opening and sits on top of the shaft. Make it out of scrap OSB or plywood. On one side of this panel, glue and screw a 2" thick piece of rigid-foam insulation. The foam faces down when the panel is in place, trimmed to fit within the shaft so that the panel is oriented to the shaft opening. You also could add a piece of foam to each side of the top panel.

The bottom panel is visible from inside the house so make it out of a piece of medium-density fiberboard (MDF) or

finish-grade plywood for the panel. Glue and screw a 2" thick piece of rigid-foam insulation to the top.



Drawing courtesy of The Family Handyman Magazine

Sealing Crawl Space Vents?

The crawl space under my house has a vapor barrier and quite a few vents, so I don't have any moisture buildup. But the floor of my house is uninsulated. So, should I close off the crawl space vents during the winter to save energy?

In the South, moisture in the crawl space is a year-round problem, so the vents should stay open. If you're concerned

