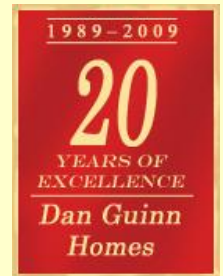


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# HOUSE WISE

October 2009  
Volume 4 Issue 10

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## Itchy and Scratchy

By Elizabeth Guinn



Every now and again I come upon a product that makes me say “I could use that”. The products usually do not include building materials like insulation but I am married to a Contractor. The thought of working with insulation just does not invoke warm and fuzzy feelings deep down in my heart. Quite the opposite actually, the fiberglass getting into my skin and eyes is just not at all pleasant, not to mention the off-gassing of formaldehyde that comes with standard insulation. Then a product comes along that changes all that. I came across a relatively new product introduced by Dow chemical in 2007, which was created to provide a solution to the itchy irritation and off-gassing problems fiberglass insulation has, called Safe Touch Insulation.

Safe Touch insulation is, well, just like the name implies is safe to touch. This means you do not have to dress up like your

Please see *Itchy* on page 2

## Inside This Issue

- 1 Itchy and Scratchy
- 1 Dan's Desk

## Dan's Desk

By Dan Guinn

Well, it's October again, and I have been thinking of a good way to kick off the fall season. I have decided to do a special scary segment to our newsletter, everyone on the edge of their seats? Careful your keyboards may be shockingly alive. Well not really, but I have come up with some scary tales of adventures in energy auditing. Like the gruesome tale of the spider, or the mystery of the elusive energy, and then there is the thermal bypass abyss. Sound scary enough for a mini-series? Probably not but let's have some fun.

Please see *Dan* on page 3

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From *Itchy* page 1

working with hazardous materials complete with gas mask to install insulation. Dressing up like this can be un-bearable especially in the summer months of the year as attics can reach a very uncomfortable 140 degrees.

Because of the moderate temperatures, it is an excellent time of the year to be thinking of adding to your attic insulation before winter sets in. Slowing down the heat loss by adding insulation to the attic is a very effective way of reducing energy bills. This is also a good time for sealing air leaks from the house to the attic. Our Energy Audit services include a blower door test which locates any and all air leaks. We also can help you determine the cost benefit of adding attic insulation.

Though not the only safe to touch product on the market, it is more affordable than other options. It is made up of polyester strands the same as what was commonly used in clothing in the 1970's. This is excellent for those of us who want to improve our energy efficiency but have a limited budget and no desire to work with itchy insulation. They also produced it without harmful chemicals that off gas. The thought of installing a product with no harmful off gassing is a big plus especially if you are concerned with indoor air quality. Whenever we can make choices that improve our air quality in our houses this is a very good thing.

Safe touch is available through most building supply centers. I have noticed it at Lowe's most recently, although you cannot find it on the web site. Like my husband would take me to any other home center! Perhaps the best part is that this product does qualify for the 30% tax credit refund of the cost of materials up to \$1500. It is available in both R-13 and R19 varieties and is an excellent choice for additional attic insulation. Just remember to use the un-faced batts for adding over top of existing attic insulation and always lay additional insulation perpendicular to existing to reduce thermal bridging. The cost is about 10-20% higher than comparable fiberglass insulation but well worth the additional investment in my opinion. There are other types of insulation utilizing greener products like recycled blue jeans. They also are easy to work with, but unfortunately the prices are nearly triple the cost of conventional insulation and availability is limited. This product by Dow gives us another healthier alternative to fiberglass.

Now if we could just get them to make it out of recycled, outdated 70's leisure suits, it would be perfect.



Call Today to Schedule your Energy Audit



Elizabeth Guinn

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From *Dan's Desk* page 1

## Let's start with my adventures with

**spiders.** Many of you may know already that spiders like to live in cold dark places. Unfortunately for me during an audit I am required to visit such places. It was on such an occasion that I had a run in with one of these creatures that I will soon not forget. I remember it like it was yesterday, it was a hot humid day much like any other summer's day. I was minding my own business poking around under a client's house taking note of missing insulation and measuring moisture and dew point. It was then that I saw lurking in the shadows my evil foe, the Brown Recluse spider. With a start I quickly tried to back out but dropping my flashlight made it quite impossible to navigate the maze of pipes and duct work! It was no use I had to go back and retrieve the flashlight! What was I to find, but the spider guarding that flashlight like it was his trophy (or hers I really have no idea). In the ensuing struggle for the flashlight many blows of my fist were struck all around him but it was no use he was able to escape into the darkness. Thinking that was the last I had seen of him, and feeling quite good about retrieving the flashlight, I decided to continue on with my work. After many tense moments of crawling around it was time to make my way out of the crawl space, fortunately there had been no sign of my foe until I reached the exit. There he was guarding the exit like a watch dog guards his dinner bowl, and I could tell by the look in his eye it was going to be either me or him in a fight to the death! Well, this did not really happen, this story sounds much more interesting. Truth is I really did have a run in with a spider, and I got bit, but never saw him, or her, or whatever. I have discovered surprising things like missing insulation and bulk moisture problems that contribute to scary energy bills. In many cases, homeowners had no idea what was going on under their houses, now that's scary.

## Next is the mystery of the elusive

**energy!** I know everyone is just on pins and needles for this one. What would we find in the middle class modern home of, let's call her Mrs. Marple (names have been changed to protect the innocent). It all started with a phone call late in the evening on a balmy summer's night. Mrs. Marple was absolutely beside herself with grief and between sobs I was able to determine that an Energy Audit was the answer to her problems. You see the source of her



Please see *Dan's Desk* page 4

Taking you from  
Dreams to Reality  
Psalms 127:1a

From *Dan's Desk* page 3

grief was the arrival of her electric bill! I assured her that we would immediately schedule her for the next day, and with that she was able to gather herself together enough to sleep that night. Upon arrival the next day my trusted assistant and I, immediately went to work. Starting with our walk thru of the house we had soon discovered the culprits. We, immediately upon completing our safety check, moved swiftly to the blower door test and confirmed our suspicions. Through her tears she explained, she tried without success to discover the mystery of why her electric bill was so high, but could not. The horror of it all struck her by surprise when we explained the can lights in her ceiling were robbing her blind! Maybe a little over dramatic but this is one of many discovered mysteries with air leaks in home construction.

**Lastly the thermal bypass abyss**, it was an energy audit much like many others when my assistant and I stumbled upon something quite disturbing. The possibility that something so egregious could have occurred in construction was just unfathomable. Upon searching the depths of an attic area we uncovered the infamous thermal bypass my instructors had warned me about in my classes. You see, this void space connecting attic and living space is a portal to a world of energy waste like no other. It has been widely suspected that many house pets are swallowed up in these areas. Not really, but it could happen! Unlike your average incandescent bulb which wastes energy for all to see these areas do their dirty work unseen behind the thin skin of drywall covering them because there is no insulation to protect from energy loss in these areas! Like a voracious animal continually gobbling up energy 24-7. We quickly informed the unsuspecting homeowner and scheduled a time to come back and eradicate the vermin pestilence that was slowly sucking the life out of his wallet. A little over the top I know but it sounds much more dramatic than “You can save fifty bucks a year if you fix it!”

That was fun but discovering energy loss does not have to be scary or a mystery, we take every job serious and we love to help our customers discover the Green Efficient Home they have always wanted.



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Looking forward to hearing from YOU!