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WEATHERIZING WINDOWS

One of the most common complaints regarding older homes is windows that don't seal out cold air. Before you choose a weatherproofing method, try to determine how the air is getting in. Outside air can seep in around the window frame, around the glass panes in the sash, or around and between the sashes themselves. Depending on the source of the air intrusion, barriers can be installed to block the draft.

For air that enters the house around the outside of the window frame, a good quality **silicone caulk** is your best defense. Make sure that any old caulk has been removed, and that the area is clean and dry. Caulk all joints between the window frame and the surrounding structure. If the gap is wide or deep, you can fill much of the space with a piece of Styrofoam **backer rod** (a sort of "foam rope"), to minimize the amount of caulk that must be used. Caulk can also be applied inside, where the wood molding joins the plaster wall. You may want to consider a clear caulk in these areas.

If the source of the draft is air coming around the glass panes of your window, it's time to replace the **glazing compound** that holds the glass in place. Over time, the glazing can harden and become brittle, creating gaps between the glass and the frame. Remove the old glazing with a putty knife and replace it with fresh, smoothing the new compound with a glazing tool or putty knife so that it creates a neat and attractive seal. (Note: glazing compound has a brief shelf life; don't try to use material from a can that has been sitting in your basement for the last six months.)

One of the most common sources of drafts is around and between the sashes in the window itself. Unfortunately, the remedies for this problem are not as effective and long-lived as the barriers provided by caulk and glazing compound. You can use inexpensive **weatherstripping** (such as "V-strips") that adhere to the frame throughout the year. **"Rope Caulk,"** a temporary barrier, can be installed between the upper and lower sashes and around the frame each winter and removed in the spring. Similarly, you can cover the entire window with one of the **plastic "shrink wraps"** that you heat with a hair dryer until you have an air seal; again, this barrier must be removed in the spring to gain access to the window.

Drafts often have their source in the cavity designed to hold the sash cords in double-hung windows. Homeowners who seek to end cold drafts by replacing their windows are often disappointed with the results, unless the contractor fills the sash cord cavity with insulation before installing the new window. **Low-expansion spray foam insulation** can sometimes be added after the window has been installed, although this measure often requires removing the woodwork around the window.

These are just some of the strategies you can use to reduce drafts from your windows. They will vary in cost and complexity, but all will help you save on energy costs and increase your comfort level.