

Alaska HomeWise: Ask a Builder
By Cold Climate Housing Research Center Staff

The "Ask a Builder" series is dedicated to answering some of the many questions Fairbanks residents have about building, energy and the many other parts of home life.

I have a log home. Is there anything special or different I need to know about insulating around doors and windows?

When they are new, log homes typically leave four to six inches of space around doors and windows to account for settling. Generally builders will stuff in some fiberglass and seal it with Visqueen or some other 6-mil. polyethylene product. If you don't know for sure, take a look inside after the home has taken a few years to settle. That space can be sealed with some compressible foam backer rod or spray foam. In order to do that, take off some of the casings around the window. If you see just fiberglass, then you'll want to make some other provisions to stop air leakage. Seals in this area are a common problem in older log homes that have air penetration problems.

I am interested in putting up some solar technology, is this something I can do myself?

A lot of people can take a little solar panel, a DC motor and some wiring and make a little fan. However, when you get into home systems, solar power is much more complex. This being Alaska, home of the do-it-yourselfer, people tend to read an article and think they can do it themselves with a quick visit to the parts counter. After purchasing some panels, batteries, controller and inverter, they may have a decent system. However, after some time they may notice their batteries are not charging as well and may be unusable, or something may have gotten fried.

Remember, a solar power project is a system and must be designed as such. The bottom line, if you are serious about installing a solar power system and you want to avoid trouble down the road, contact a professional.

Carpets give off a lot of chemical gasses. Are there safer types of carpet out there?

In winter in Alaska, some people will spend well over 90% of their time indoors. This means that indoor air quality is especially important, particularly for people with chemical sensitivities, respiratory sensitivities, and children. Fortunately, there are a variety of different manufacturers out there that make products with relatively little off gassing. One good place to start is an organization called the Carpet and Rug Institute. They can be found online (www.carpet-rug.org) and have a program called "Green Label Plus." This program screens and independently tests carpets for the presence and concentrations of 13 different hazardous chemicals. Only if the carpet passes those tests does it get the certification, so the Institute is a good first place to look. They also have information on products, testing procedures, and practical advice on what to look for in a carpet.

Alaska HomeWise articles promote home awareness for the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC). If you have a question, e-mail us at akhomewise@cchrc.org. You can also call the CCHRC at (907) 457-3454