

Check Your Home Energy Usage: DIY Versus Professional Home Energy Audit

If your home's energy costs are a cause for concern, a good first step to lowering them is doing an energy audit of your home. An energy audit will look at how much energy you are using and where the majority of this energy is used. Investing in hazard mitigation protects your home, enhances resilience, and saves money by preparing for extreme weather conditions.

You can do the following to determine how energy efficient your home is:

- 1. Check your bills:** Look at your home's energy costs over the last year. If you notice any trends or sudden spikes in spending, it may indicate when a problem started. You can expect that bills will be slightly higher in the summer months when your air conditioner runs a lot more often.
- 2. Look for leaks:** You may be able to identify air leaks around your windows or doors that are making your home's HVAC system work overtime. If you see light coming in through the cracks of your door or see visible gaps in window sashes, the weatherstripping needs to be replaced.
- 3. Look for hot or cold zones:** Depending on the weather outside, there may be small areas of the home that feel hotter or colder while the rest of the home feels comfortable. Entire rooms being different temperatures may indicate a window or duct leak. Alternatively, uneven insulation in your attic may be causing temperatures to differ in your home.
- 4. Evaluate your appliances and fixtures:** If you have older appliances and incandescent bulbs, these could be using a significant amount of energy and raising energy costs. Opting for Energy Star rated fixtures and appliances can reduce the amount of energy used without sacrificing performance.
- 5. Inspect your insulation:** If you know for sure that your insulation does not contain asbestos, you can go in your attic and measure the insulation height. If you see the joists, that means you likely don't have adequate insulation and may need to apply more.

You can also hire a professional to conduct an official energy audit to better identify points where energy is being lost in the home.

A professional will likely use a thermal camera to determine temperature variations and potential causes. A blower door test is also typically done to determine how airtight your home is and determine if there are leaks in the building envelope. Depending on the auditor you hire, they will likely also look at your fixtures, appliances and HVAC system to determine which is using the most energy.



Thermal cameras can determine temperature variations. Stock photo

While energy audits done by professionals can be expensive, they can better determine the problems with your home's energy system. An energy audit performed by a professional will typically give you the following information:

- A report of where the majority of the energy in your home is being used
- A list of improvements to address high energy spending and the price of these improvements

If an energy auditor recommends certain work or maintenance to your home, be sure to look into incentive programs in your state to see if there is a program to help cover the cost. Before you hire any contractors, check the state's board of contractors website to make sure they are qualified.



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