



# The Daily Gleaner

December 2, 2007

## Smart Steps. Cool Savings.

Fredericton residents – coming soon in your mailbox is a pamphlet called ‘Smart Steps. Cool Savings.’ This informational mail-out is from Fredericton’s **Green Matters** Fall/Winter Energy campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Don’t throw it out or recycle it - this pamphlet is worth money! Follow the energy-saving tips and it might mean hundreds of dollars stay in your bank account this winter.

Last weekend I got serious about energy loss in my home. In promoting the Green Matters energy campaign (You’ve got the POWER! Lower your energy use), I decided it was time for me to put words into action and get my hands dirty, literally.

Years ago, we removed an inefficient woodstove insert from our fireplace and since then the empty fireplace has been a gaping hole in our living room. We’ve mostly ignored it, and have tried, somewhat unsuccessfully, to decorate around it. When the insert was removed by professionals, we expected that the damper was left closed and that insulation was put up there as we had asked. Well, last weekend I learned this was not the case.

After putting it off for too long, I removed the camouflaging decor from our fireplace, put on a headlamp, and finally, looked up into the chimney. YIKES! I could see daylight – a lot of daylight (and even if you are out of the ‘energy reduction’ loop – you know this is not good!). The damper was open and broken, and only a few small sooty pieces of insulation were hanging in the gap.

Research shows that small air leaks in a fireplace can cost a homeowner \$200 in energy loss annually, while larger leaks can amount to over \$500 ‘out the chimney’. I was scared to do the financial tally on my situation. My fireplace was Santa’s dream - full, unencumbered access to the living room, straight from the sky. So what did I do? I pulled out the old insulation and packed it tightly with new insulation. The next step is to call a specialist to put in a new damper or permanently seal the fireplace in the recommended manner.

There are many old, unused fireplaces in Fredericton’s beautiful heritage homes and in newer homes too. If you have a fireplace, I suggest you check it out for heat loss. Piece of advice though; don’t wear white, do use a flashlight or headlamp and don’t let anyone open the damper when your head is in there!

If you do use your fireplace – installing glass doors cuts down heat loss significantly. Lastly, remember that any serious fireplace sealing work should be done by an expert. Installing a damper is not my bag, baby, and chances are - it’s not yours either!

My next task, after seriously impeding Santa’s chances of getting down our chimney, was to caulk my leaky 40-year-old picture window. Caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows can significantly reduce home heat loss and generally it is a job even a beginner can tackle. For windows that you want to open again in summer, use a product such as *Draft Stop removable weather stripping* and a caulking gun. I use the transparent version of this product so my mistakes generally go unnoticed. And because it is removable, once the product dries I can peel

away any extra messy lumps. I am not an expert on caulking and weather-stripping, so I did an Internet search on these terms and got some great tips on where and how to use each method.

The 'Smart Steps, Cool Savings' pamphlet provides more ways to reduce home energy loss and save money. If you need any 'gear' to get you started – a headlamp and caulking gun make very fine Christmas gifts, as for me . . .

**Dear Santa,**

**Please bring me some good ideas on how to lower my energy use this winter. And if you have room in your sleigh, a wool sweater would be nice too.**

**Love, Sonya**

*Sonya Hull is a consultant and project manager for the City of Fredericton's Green Matters greenhouse gas reduction campaign. At [www.greenmattersfredericton.com](http://www.greenmattersfredericton.com) you can download the 'Smart Steps. Cool Savings' pamphlet, and find many more energy-saving tips – just click on the 'You've got the POWER!' button.*