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HOME IMPROVEMENT

By Bernard Gladstone
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EFFORTS to reduce home "operating costs" by conserving energy and doing many repair and improvement jobs are essential for many people, and they are on the lookout for new tools and other products to ease the task.

Here are some items that should prove of interest: Plastic Storm Windows

A variety of plastic storm-window kits can be installed to eliminate drafts and prevent condensation as well as greatly reduce the energy lost through the glass. The least expensive and bestselling type uses a clear flexible film that is secured around the edges with staples or tape. But the plastic is often difficult to install neatly and leaves unsightly wrinkles.

To overcome this the 3M Company's household and hardware products division, 3M Center, St. Paul, Minn. 55144, has introduced the Window Insulator. The plastic in this kit has the optical properties of glass and can be shrunk after it is in place by applying heat with a hair dryer.

The kit, at about \$4.50, contains a roll of double-coated clear tape for mounting plus enough material to cover a 3-by-5-foot window; a larger kit with enough material for five windows sells for \$15.75.

First you press the tape into position around the window trim, then hold the plastic film in front of the window, stretch it as smooth as you can and press it in place onto the tape. Use the hair dryer to shrink or stretch the film until it has no wrinkles. Trim off any excess with a razor blade. **Seals for Patio Doors**

Stanley Works, 195 Lake Street, New Britain, Conn. 06050, has introduced do-it-yourself weatherstripping materials for sliding glass patio doors. The Stanley Sliding Patio Door Weather Seal contains enough material for the movable panels of a door up to six feet wide. The kit, with a suggested price of \$12.95, provides five 40-inch lengths and one 36-inch length of self-adhesive plastic strips that are gray to blend with the aluminum frame. **For Baseboard Radiators**

Most baseboard radiators are enclosed in a steel housing with a metal backplate. Each time the radiator goes on a lot of heat is absorbed by the backplate and lost into the wall behind it, especially if the wall is an outside one. To prevent this Columbia Energy Systems, Box 164, Somerville, Mass. 02143, is marketing a material called Flexo-Therm that can be slid inside the radiator housing - behind the convection fins but in front of the backplate - to insulate the backplate while reflecting heat into the room.

Flexo-Therm, which contains no asbestos, is made of a special ceramic material, looks like one-eighth-inch-thick felt and has an insulation rating of R-3. It sells for \$14.99 for a 12-foot roll six inches wide. The manufacturer claims a saving of 12 percent with most convector-type baseboard radiators and says it qualifies for energy tax credits. **Rechargeable Lights**

Two new rechargeable lights can eliminate worry about having fresh batteries when you need a flashlight, portable lantern or trouble light. One, the First Alert Ready-Lite, is made by Pittway, 780 McClure Road, Aurora, Ill. 60504; the other, the Spotlitter, is made by Black & Decker, 3012 Highwoods Boulevard, Raleigh, N.C. 27625.

Each comes with a mounting bracket that is also used for charging the built-in batteries. You mount the bracket on a wall or shelf where its cord can reach an electric outlet. When the light is in the bracket and the unit is plugged in, the batteries automatically recharge. The light can be left indefinitely until needed. Both products have a two-position switch, one for high power and one for low.

The First Alert Ready-Lite, with a suggested price of \$35 to \$39, also has a switch that changes the beam from a narrow spot to a wide flood. The light can be tilted and it has a flat end so it can serve as an emergency lantern. It will last more than two and a half hours on a full charge.

The Spotlitter, \$25, has a pullout bracket so it can stand and shine up at an angle. It will last about an hour and a half on a full charge. Electric Screwdriver

Weighing only 1.5 pounds and looking like a portable electric drill, the Model 2000 Cordless screwdriver has built-in rechargeable batteries and can be used anywhere. It is made Skil, 4801 West Peterson Avenue, Chicago, Ill. 60646, and is priced at less than \$35. The screwdriver has triple-reduction gearing that gives it more power than any other such tool. It can be fully recharged in three hours and will drive up to 500 screws on one charge.

The tool comes with a double-ended bit, one end a straight blade and the other a Phillips. It is held by a special snap-in collet chuck, with a locking collar that enables you to apply extra pressure. With hex-head nut drivers it can also be used on nuts and bolts. It has a reversing switch. Heat Gun

The Heat 'N Strip Electric Paint Remover is a 1,200-watt gun that delivers a blast of superheated air (from 480 to 570 degrees). Primarily designed for paint, varnish and similar coatings, the gun blisters the finish and softens it so it can easily be scraped off.

Made by Black & Decker's consumer power tools division, 701 East Joppa Road, Towson, Md. 21204, the device allows you to control the heat and will not char wood the way a torch will. It eliminates the need for chemicals and is ideal for softening floor tiles, shrinking tubing and bending plastic.

Illustrations: photo of hair dryer photo of flash light photo of heat gun

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