**Weather the Season: Four Ways to Leave Winter Remodeling Challenges Out in the Cold**

By Sulema Vela, Southern Division Pro Director, The Home Depot

Winter weather often exposes vulnerabilities that potentially can require extensive and expensive home maintenance. Unfortunately, most owners only realize that their houses are not ready for the season when snow is falling or a high utility bill arrives.

As the fall season concludes, now is the perfect time to help your customers refine their homes for the approaching weather shift. Whether you are in the middle of a remodel or selling the value of proactive maintenance, there are plenty of opportunities for improvements that can deliver the comforts of a warm, fully-functional home at a manageable cost.

The following four strategies are essentials for any successful winter weatherization checklist.

**Reinforce the Attic**

Many homes – especially older models – lack the proper amount of attic insulation to successfully retain heat. Fortunately, the attic also is among the easiest areas of the home to refine for the winter. Different regions of the country have different recommended R-values, which define how well a building resists heat. Use The Home Depot’s attic insulation calculator to determine your area’s recommended R-value and estimate how much insulation will be required for a particular attic. If applied properly, insulation can reduce overall energy costs by up to 20 percent.

Modern insulation also can deliver benefits beyond temperature control. Merchants from The Home Depot worked with Owens Corning to develop Pure Safety High Performance Insulation, which helps maintain healthy air quality. Available only at The Home Depot, this insulation is asthma and allergy certified by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. For added benefit, the Owens Corning offering also is fire resistant and deters noise, helping your customers sleep better knowing their family will be safe and healthy.

**Mind the Gaps**

To combat chills, many home owners simply opt to crank the heat, which works in the short-term but proves costly by season’s end. Quick fixes, such as sealing gaps and cracks, prove much more cost efficient. The average home has enough air leakage to fill a two-foot square hole – per Department of Energy estimates, this is the equivalent of leaving a window open all day.

Recommend a thorough property walk through to determine the areas of the home that are most susceptible to drafts. Keep an eye out for holes, cracks and other gaps that can invite cold air, particularly near doors, windows, vents and pipes. If these areas need repair, foam sealants, weather strips and caulk offer low-hassle, low-cost fixes.

Pipe maintenance also becomes more critical as the threat of a freeze rises. As you complete your walk through, be sure to evaluate internal and external pipes for cracks or insulation inconsistencies that could cause damage or disrupt water service. A burst pipe costs an average of $5,000 to repair, according to the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety. On the other hand, pipe insulation costs less than a dollar per foot, and a smarter recommendation.

**Heat Smarter**

Why should your customers pay extra to heat unoccupied rooms? Recommend an upgrade to a modern, smart thermostat that reduces the toll on HVAC systems while also adding a contemporary feel to the home. These thermostats sense movement and room occupancy, and automatically activate and shut off heat to match. Chances are your customers have heard of smart thermostats, but have hesitated to upgrade in fear of installation challenges – this is a perfect opportunity for you and your team to take the lead.

For added convenience, recommend a new option like the ecobee4 with specialized technology that makes the thermostat more accurate and convenient. This model allows you to connect up to 32 room sensors to ensure even temperature across the home, and also features Amazon Alexa Voice service for simplified control.

**A Bright – and Efficient – Idea**

Shorter days and longer nights mean more electricity usage. Recommending a change to energy efficient light bulbs is a simple and often overlooked way for customers to keep costs down.

LED bulbs use 85 percent less energy than regular incandescent bulbs, which can lead to significant savings. However, many customers have been reluctant to switch due to perceived weaker light quality when compared to incandescent alternatives. Fortunately, modern LED bulbs can provide rich, natural lighting.

The Cree 75-Watt replacement LED R20, for example, is one of the brightest R20 LED bulbs available. Exclusive to The Home Depot, this bulb is a great option for areas of the home where customers want the most light, such as rooms with high ceilings. It also lasts more than 20 years, so customers won’t have to worry about climbing a ladder any time soon.

Successful weatherization often is the result of thorough consultation, and the ability for you and your customers to detect and address potential hazards before they become large-scale problems. Take precautions to ensure your remodel work can withstand the rigors of the season, and spare your customers from the chills, frustrations and expenses that far too often define winter.

*Sulema Vela is responsible for the Pro business in The Home Depot’s Southern Division, leading a team of more than 80 Pro Account Representatives in an area that encompasses 700 stores across 13 states. She has more than 18 years of experience at The Home Depot, starting in 1999 as a part-time cashier while she earned her Bachelor’s degree in business administration. During her time at The Home Depot, Sulema has served in a variety of roles and capacities – including department supervisor, assistant store manager, store manager and district manager.*