

# Why an Energy Audit?



## HVAC Inspection or Energy Audit?

The more comprehensive energy audit or home performance evaluation locates a home's air leaks, whereas an HVAC inspection assesses the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning in a home. An HVAC inspection can detect carbon monoxide leaks and defects and issues affecting your home's major components.

### Audit Essentials

Costs for an energy audit range from \$300 to \$1,000. To find a qualified professional to do an energy audit, visit the California Building Performance Contractors Association (CBPCA) Web site: [www.cbpc.org](http://www.cbpc.org). Visit ENERGY STAR ([www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)) and click on the Home Improvement tab for info on home performance evaluations or audits. A professional inspection should include the use of blower doors and infrared cameras at a minimum.

**Y**ou've heard of being audited for taxes by the government, but have you heard of an energy audit? One benefits the government; the other ultimately benefits your pocketbook and reduces your carbon footprint.

### Is Your Home a Leaker?

» According to the U.S. Department of Energy, an energy audit is "the first step to assess how much energy your home consumes and to evaluate what measures you can take to make your home more energy efficient." "Energy audits started over 20 years ago," says Rick Chitwood, energy consultant, building tester, trainer, and owner of Chitwood Energy Management, which offers home performance evaluations. Originally, such inspections were done on commercial buildings. "Now we have all the test equipment that's inexpensive enough to use on homes." An energy audit tests rooms for leaks and air infiltration to see how much energy is used (and lost) in a home.

You can do a preliminary energy audit yourself by looking for air leaks, inspecting both the interior and exterior. You should also check to see if any holes around your sinks and faucets need to be caulked. The U.S. Department of Energy Web site has instructions for do-it-yourselfers: Do It Yourself Energy Audit. However, if you want an energy audit done professionally, you can contact the California Building Performance Contractors Association (CBPCA). The CBPCA receives funding from Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas and Electric and is a non-profit organization that trains and certifies contractors through its Green Home Energy Upgrade program.

An energy audit can identify the causes of a home's temperature extremes and recommend changes and modifications that will result in better energy efficiency and improved indoor air quality.

### Professional Inspections

» A professional inspection should include the use of blower doors and infrared cameras at a minimum. A blower door is used to test how airtight your home is. Infrared cameras detect air leakage by using thermography to measure a surface's temperature. According to Chitwood, an energy audit price tag can range from \$300 to \$1,000. Some contractors base their quote after an initial home inspection; others offer a flat rate. And he insists that energy audits should not be done during a real estate transaction, believing that it slows the process and is most cost-efficient when done at the time a homeowner is doing an upgrade.

Homeowners across the country are trying to cut energy costs by replacing light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) and installing energy-efficient appliances. However, the real savings might be in doing an energy audit. Chitwood states, "We need to pay more attention to evidence, not marketing. An average brand-new or existing home can improve its energy efficiency by 60 to 80 percent with across-the-board upgrades after an energy audit." ♦

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