



Houle Insulation:

Long-time Xcel Energy Trade Partner wins Efficiency Partner Award



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Kari Olson,
Owner, Houle Insulation

For 30 years, Houle Insulation has been re-insulating homes in Minnesota, and helping customers all over the state save energy and collect Xcel Energy rebates. Those efforts — combined with the fact that they helped save 1,974 dekatherms in 2017 alone — earned them an Energy Efficiency Partner Award in 2018.

Three such residential insulation-related awards were given, but Houle accounted for 17 percent of all of the insulation-related savings. They helped 64 homeowners add insulation to their homes, and subtract dollars off their energy bills. And that was all accomplished in a single year.

Committed to comfort

Houle's specialty is insulation on existing homes, to include sidewalls, attics, and bypass sealing. They use cellulose insulation which is blown into walls and floors for a tight seal.

According to ENERGY STAR®, a better insulated home is more energy efficient, comfortable and quiet. It will save the homeowner money on utility bills for years to come. Also, by using less energy to heat and cool the home, it reduces the negative impacts on the environment caused by energy use.

As a long-time trade partner with Xcel Energy, they not only do the insulation work, but help the customer by filling out the rebate application. Owner Kari Olson says it's important to them to be a preferred partner for Xcel Energy and other utilities.

"We've been a partner since they started offering rebates," Olson explains. "It requires extra paperwork and extra training, but it's worth it. Customers who work with us can feel confident that we've been vetted and can also help them get their rebate dollars to offset the cost of the installation."

Should I add insulation?

If you're wondering whether you need insulation, here are general guidelines to consider:

- If your home was built prior to 1950 and you haven't added insulation, you could be using about 60 percent more energy per square foot, than homes built in 2000 or later.
- You are uncomfortably cold in the winter or hot in the summer — insulation creates a more uniform temperature and increases comfort.
- You are bothered by noise from outside — insulation muffles sound.
- You have humidity issues in your home — insulation helps control humidity.

New rules, new roles

As of January 2015, customers wanting to upgrade their insulation are now required to go through a BPI-certified contractor installation. It's a new requirement that helps protect consumers.

BPI GoldStar Contractors conduct a comprehensive energy audit to find problems, then prescribe and prioritize improvements that make the home's system function at its best. The goal is to help improve the comfort, health, safety, durability and energy efficiency of America's existing homes.

"This requirement ensures that the work a homeowner is having done will be done correctly and help them qualify for money-saving rebates," says Shari Kelley, Xcel Energy program manager. "If your home doesn't have adequate insulation, you may be losing up to 25 percent of your heating or cooling energy."

Kelley says people can think of insulation as the hat and coat for their home: it keeps warm air in and makes people more comfortable.

To help offset the cost of new insulation Xcel Energy offers rebates for qualifying projects. Rebates equal up to 20 percent of the total cost of the insulation with a maximum of \$300. And as a bonus, insulation typically pays for itself in reduced energy bills over the course of five to six years.

"People call us about frost, mold and water damage to their ceilings," Olson says. "The discomforts of a poorly insulated home are often wrongly blamed on furnace and air conditioning problems when the actual cause is the insulation itself or how it was installed."

Houle's happy customers and long list of accolades speak for themselves.

Houle Insulation, Inc. won the small business of the Year Award from the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce in 2005. They have also received the Angie's List Super Service award every year since 2003. They are a member of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI), Minnesota Chapter. And they can now add Energy Efficiency Partner Award to the list.

"The awards are a testament to our crews," Olson says. "We expect a lot from them and they continue to do great work and make people more comfortable. Customers send us great thank you notes and we make sure to pass them along."



Why insulate?

The Department of Energy finds that sealing air leaks and adding insulation helps achieve the following in your home:

- Reduces the cost of heating and cooling by 40 percent (insulation helps in the summer, too)
- Reduces noise from outside
- Reduces pollen, dust and insects from entering your home
- Lowers the chance for ice dams on the roof/eaves in snowy climates
- Improves humidity control
- Improves the overall comfort of your home

For more information about Xcel Energy's insulation rebates, please visit xcelenergy.com/HomeRebates.