



COLD CLIMATE HOUSING RESEARCH CENTER

**CCHRC**

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## ENERGY FOCUS

### Good Communication Key to a Successful Weatherization Rebate

By Adam Wasch, Energy Outreach Consultant for CCHRC and CES

Meeting a contractor for the first time can be more nerve racking than going on a blind date. What habits does he or she have? Will you agree on the work that needs to be done? And, most importantly, will they take into account your needs? Plus, with so many Alaskans weatherizing their homes and lining up home improvement projects for the spring, will you even get a second date?

Fortunately, if you're among the thousands of Alaskans who've received an energy rating through the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) and the Fairbanks Portal on Retrofits Training and Loans (PORTAL), you are already one step ahead. Every rating comes with an itemized list of recommended work customized to increase the energy efficiency of your home. This serves as an excellent guide going forward. You perform as many or as few of these improvements as you want. You can perform the work yourself or hire a contractor. AHFC will reimburse you for material costs and, if you hire out to do the work, for labor, too – up to \$10,000 if you achieve a post-rating that scores high enough.

The keys to a successful contractor relationship include knowing what you want done, doing your research, and planning ahead. Contractors have begun to line up their business for the warmer months. Plan now to avoid longer waits and higher prices. When you avoid the rush, you'll have more time to compare estimates, understand your options, and budget for costs. Contractors should be licensed and insured, and provide references. But remember, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

The best source of information about your energy rating is the energy rater him- or herself and, of course, the PORTAL (455-4328). Don't assume anything. Ask questions. The improvements your rater recommends aren't guaranteed to result in a certain rebate amount, but they are reliable estimates. If you are unsure about how to perform any of the recommended work, the right materials for the job, or possible alternative ways to get the work done, ask your rater first. You won't be reimbursed for any work that is not listed on your energy rating form.

The more you understand the work outlined by your rater, the better you will be able to shop for the best material prices and compare quotes from competing contractors. You have 18 months from the time you receive your energy rating to when you must complete work and request the rebate. Keeping all your paperwork straight is essential – receipts for, well, everything related to your improvements. If you hire a contractor, keep the bills you pay. Save cancelled checks. Make sure you keep a copy of your original energy rating, too.

Home improvement, like dating, is hard work. There exist hidden dangers, drama, and just maybe a sizable reward. The importance of good communication and reasonable expectations cannot be overstated. In the end, you must take responsibility for the outcome you want to achieve. The folks at the PORTAL are ready to help, though. If you haven't gotten your initial energy rating, call for one today.

**Adam Wasch promotes energy awareness for the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC).**

**For questions or comments please contact CCHRC at (907) 457-3454**