Get a **Home Energy Audit**

**Choosing a Contractor**

**If you qualify for NH SAVES rebates**, your utility will assign you a qualified contractor when they approve your application. Your audit fee will be $100 and all prices for energy upgrades are pre-determined.

**If you are NOT participating in NH SAVES**, choose a contractor who is certified by the Building Performance Institute. Contact Vital Communities for help identifying qualified local contractors:

energy@vitalcommunities.org

**Tips**

- **Outside of the NH SAVES program**, call around and check online to compare companies and their energy audit prices.
- The contractor you choose for your energy audit will also complete your energy upgrades if you choose to move forward with a project.

**The Best Time to Schedule Your Energy Audit**

Schedule your energy audit **RIGHT AWAY** if:

- **You have other renovations planned.** There may be ways to improve energy efficiency as part of other renovations.
- **You are eligible for a special program.** Check with Vital Communities and NH SAVES about any time-limited deals. You wouldn’t want to miss out!
- **You are concerned** about going through your first winter without energy upgrades.

Otherwise, plan for **FEBRUARY** of your first winter, when you can answer the following questions:

- Where do icicles and ice dams form?
- Where do you feel cold drafts?
- What rooms are too hot or too cold?
- Where do you have mold/mildew issues?
- Which issues are you most concerned about? (e.g. savings, comfort, elimination of ice dams)

With an energy audit in February, you’ll be ready to begin energy upgrades as early as March/April.

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**A Typical Energy Audit**

*Takes 3-4 hours*

*Homeowner should be present*

- Blower door testing to measure and locate air leakage
- Efficiency & safety testing of combustion appliances
- Infrared thermal imaging to isolate air leakage and insulation gaps
- Inspection of all accessible basements, crawls, knee-walls, & attics
- A final report including recommended improvements, cost, & expected savings.

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**vital COMMUNITIES**

Green Real Estate
Tips for Selecting a Weatherization Contractor

For residents hiring a contractor on their own (including ALL Vermont residents and any New Hampshire residents not participating in the NHSaves program)

If You Are Participating in the Efficiency Vermont Rebate Program
efficiencyvermont.com/weatherize

All Vermonters are eligible for weatherization rebates through Efficiency Vermont, regardless of income or amount of heating fuel used.

Efficiency Vermont requires you to hire your own contractor from their Efficiency Excellence Network. Prices and services may vary from contractor to contractor, so use this guide to help you choose a contractor.

Any contractor from Efficiency Vermont’s approved list will be able to enroll you in Efficiency Vermont’s rebate program after you complete your home energy audit.

If You Are Participating in the NHSaves Rebate Program
energyaudit.nhsaves.com

Some Granite Staters are eligible for weatherization rebates through NHSaves, based on how much energy you use for heating per square foot. If you are eligible for NHSaves rebates, you do not need to use this guide because once your rebate application is approved, NHSaves will assign you a qualified contractor who regularly serves your community and has availability to serve you in a timely manner. Pricing for NHSaves weatherization projects is pre-set by NHSaves and does not vary between contractors.

You may, if you wish, request a specific contractor when submitting their NHSaves application. To do this, select your preferred contractor from the “Auditors” drop down list next to the signature field.

Important Notes

- You are hiring a contractor who will BOTH complete your energy audit, AND (if you choose to move forward) complete/coordinate your weatherization project.
- Don’t judge a company by its website. The best way to determine whether a company is a good fit for you is to call and talk with them.
- All NHSaves and Efficiency Vermont contractors are certified by the national Building Performance Institute (BPI) and subject to quality assurance checks by NHSaves or Efficiency Vermont. It is usually safest to hire a contractor who participates in either NHSaves or Efficiency Vermont programs, though there are some BPI certified contractors who do not.

Homework Before You Get Started

Draft a brief summary of your home and weatherization priorities to share when you speak with prospective contractors. Include:

- Age, square footage, and style (e.g. cape, ranch, farmhouse)
- Brief description of insulation (e.g. type, age, condition, amount, if known)
- Your top concerns/priorities (e.g. reducing drafts, addressing ice dams, saving money, etc.)

This guide was created by Vital Communities in November 2019. Contact energy@vitalcommunities.org with questions.
Questions to Ask

1. **Who does the energy audit?** If possible, try to speak with the person who does the energy audits.

2. **What else does your company specialize in, besides weatherization?** Some companies are all weatherization all the time. Others are general contractors and home builders who also do energy audits and weatherization.

3. **Who does the work? Do you have your own crews?** Some companies have all their own crews and equipment. Other companies have energy auditors on staff and manage your project like a general contractor, hiring the right sub-contractors to meet your needs.

4. **How far out are you scheduling energy audits right now?**

5. **How far out are you scheduling jobs right now?**

6. **How much do you charge for an energy audit?** Prices vary. Expect to pay several hundred dollars. Some contractors credit the audit fee toward your project if you choose to move ahead. Others choose not to charge for an audit at all if they can tell you are serious about weatherization. No matter what the price, an energy audit is worthwhile and is ALWAYS the first step in any weatherization project.

7. **What do you include in your audit reports? What DON’T you include in your audit reports? Do you have a sample report I can look at?** In Vermont, every company has its own unique format/approach to energy audit reports. In New Hampshire, most contractors provide reports that mimic the standard report required by NHSaves for rebate program participants. The level of detail in the descriptions within an audit report will vary from company to company. Some are short and to the point, others more descriptive.

8. **Briefly describe your home and priorities, then ask whether they think they would be a good fit for your needs.**

9. **How do you think your prices line up with other contractors (for the same work scope)?**

10. **What makes you unique among weatherization contractors?**
What to Expect During your Energy Audit

Length: Typically 3-4 hours

Common Elements of an Energy Audit:

Your contractor will base their recommendations on a combination of diagnostic testing, visual inspection, and their own professional experience. Weatherization contractors are able to provide good recommendations even if they are unable to complete a blower door test or use infrared imaging during the home energy audit.

1. **Combustion testing** checks whether your heating system and other combustion appliances are adequately vented for your safety.
2. A **blower door test** de-pressurizes your home to measure/identify air leakage.
   a. Will NOT be completed if depressurization would disturb potentially hazardous material (e.g. vermiculite, mold), or create back-drafting in a warm woodstove.
3. **Inspection of all accessible insulation** (e.g. attic, basement, knee walls, etc.)
4. **Infrared camera** (used sometimes, but not always, to further assess air leakage and insulation levels)
   a. Thermal imaging works best when there is a significant temperature difference between indoors and outdoors.
5. **Energy audit report** (completed and sent to you after the audit; contains detailed recommendations)

Pre-Audit Checklist for Homeowners:

- □ Plan to be present and follow your contractor around during the audit. This can be as valuable as reading the written energy audit report.
- □ Call your contractor the day before your audit to confirm your date/time.
- □ Ensure there is a clear path to access your attic and any knee walls or crawl spaces.
- □ Do not light a fire in your woodstove on the day of your energy audit – your stove must be completely cold, with no embers whatsoever, in order to safely complete a blower door test.
- □ Make sure your furnace is operational (can be turned on; is not awaiting repairs) – this is necessary for the combustion testing portion of your audit.
- □ Prepare a summary of the following (written and/or verbal), even if your contractor doesn’t ask for it:
  o How much fuel do you use each year?
  o Is your thermostat programmed? What temperatures do set your thermostat to?
  o Where in your house do you notice cold floors, condensation, drafts
  o Where do ice dams and/or icicles occur?
  o Have you noticed any snow melt patterns on your roof? Spots that melt sooner than others?
  o What are your weatherization priorities? Cost savings? Comfort? Reduced ice dams?
  o Are you planning any other home renovations in the next year or so?
  o Does your home have vermiculite, radon issues, knob and tube wiring, or mold?
- □ Prepare a list of any specific questions you have for your contractor.

After Your Audit:

- • Ask when you can expect to receive an audit report. Contact your contractor if you have not received a report by the promised day.
- • You are under no obligation to move forward with any of your contractor’s recommendations.