



Highlights: Window Installers

For those ready to replace old, drafty windows, *Washington Consumers' CHECKBOOK* magazine, available at www.checkbook.org, warns to shop for windows and a good installer with care. CHECKBOOK rates 56 local window installation companies for both price and quality of service and gives advice on choosing type and quality of windows, whether for replacement or for new installations. Highlights from the article include:

- CHECKBOOK's shoppers gathered quotes for several window replacement jobs and found significant price differences among installers for the same specific job. For one carefully specified replacement job, for example, CHECKBOOK found a price range from \$1,770 to \$5,058 among local companies.
- There are, unfortunately, a lot of unhappy customers of window installers. Some companies were rated "inferior" for "overall performance" by 30 percent or more of their surveyed customers. But there are also some very high-rated companies.
- Consumers are likely to find it will take many years, if ever, for savings from energy efficiency improvements to offset the full cost of installing new windows. For example, for one sample house with 300 square feet of leaky windows, CHECKBOOK estimated that installing some of the most energy-efficient, triple-glazed windows available would result in energy savings of only about \$360 per year.
- On the other hand, many consumers will want replacement windows for reasons other than energy savings, such as comfort, appearance, or concern for the environment. Key considerations are how long you will be keeping your house; how much the windows may boost resale value, and how much you value the improved comfort and appearance new windows will provide.
- CHECKBOOK recommends consumers check whether government programs or local utility companies offer rebates or loans for installing energy-efficient windows. An excellent resource is www.dsireusa.org, which maintains a national database of such incentives.
- Consumers should insist on evidence of any energy savings salespersons claim to justify a higher price. No one should buy a window that does not have a label from the National Fenestration Rating Council showing U-factor, solar heat gain coefficient, and visible transmittance. Consumers can check energy savings calculations for themselves using a tool from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory available at <http://windows.lbl.gov>.
- There are several indicators of likely window durability. For vinyl windows, consumers should ask for manufacturer specifications indicating frames are welded, rather than screwed, together. For wood windows, consumers should ask for evidence of drainage holes that will prevent moisture accumulation. In general, consumers should pay close attention to warranties. Warranties for high-quality windows often run for 20 years and aren't subject to pro-rated reductions in covered value as time passes.

The media may cite selected examples of top-rated window installers, as shown in the new issue of Washington Consumers' CHECKBOOK, and CHECKBOOK's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.