



# Ventilating your home

## FACT SHEET



APARTMENT & CONDO  
EFFICIENCY SERVICES



ENERGY STAR  
PRODUCTS



HOME PERFORMANCE  
WITH ENERGY STAR



WISCONSIN  
ENERGY STAR HOMES



EFFICIENT HEATING  
& COOLING

For more information  
call 800.762.7077 or  
visit [focusonenergy.com](http://focusonenergy.com)

**B**uild tight and ventilate right is the mantra for builders of energy-efficient, high-performance homes. In cold climates, minimizing uncontrolled air leakage is a prerequisite for enhancing a home's comfort, energy efficiency, indoor air quality and moisture control.

### WHY VENTILATION IS IMPORTANT

Fresh air is essential to the health and well-being of our homes, new and old, and of the people who occupy them. Properly-installed and operated ventilation systems give homeowners the ability to enhance indoor air quality by diluting indoor pollutants and odors, controlling winter moisture levels, and providing air exchange as needed.

In new homes, proper ventilation is important because the structures are sealed, trapping the various synthetic materials and cleaning products that pollute our indoor air. We also spend more time indoors than previous generations and generate more indoor moisture with the use of hot showers, washing machines, and dishwashers.

Many older homes rely on natural ventilation—that is, uncontrolled air movement through cracks and small holes in the building structure, as well as through doors and windows. While natural ventilation may seem adequate for supplying the fresh air we need, it can result in drafts and “leaky” homes that reduce comfort in extreme weather and can be expensive to heat and cool. What's more, the moisture generated by occupants exhausts through the cracks and leaks—often into the attic. This can result in moisture-related problems that can compromise the building's structure.

### TEST AND RETEST FOR PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY

Excess moisture in the home can contribute to a variety of problems: mildew, odors, frost and ice on cold surfaces, ice dams on roofs, and more. Left unchecked, these problems can lead to structural damage.

That's why it's important to test your home's performance and make sure its systems are operating as they should. A consultant partnering with Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® can perform these tests to identify problems and recommend solutions.

For example, testing has shown that many exhaust fans don't draw out enough air, due to improper sizing, problems with ductwork or other reasons. Some exhaust fans draw



**A consultant partnering with Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® measures exhaust ventilation airflow to ensure the system performs correctly.**

out so much air that the home becomes depressurized (the air pressure inside the house becomes lower than the air pressure outside the house). This depressurized condition can impact the safe operation of some combustion devices such as atmospherically-vented water heaters and fireplaces. Combustion gases may spill into the home creating an unsafe environment.

Thorough testing by a partnering consultant can help you ensure proper ventilation and increase the comfort, safety, and durability of your home.

### HOW TO VENTILATE YOUR HOME

Controlled ventilation strategies include spot ventilation (using localized exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms) and whole-house or central ventilation systems (one or more fans and duct systems that exhaust stale air and/or supply fresh air).

#### Spot ventilation

Exhaust fans quickly remove pollutants, odors and/or moisture at their source or as they are generated. Ventilation fans in the bathroom and kitchen are critical because most moisture and odors are generated in these areas. To maximize the effectiveness of spot ventilation:

- Fans should be located as close as possible to the source of pollution and moisture. In the kitchen, use range hoods that exhaust air to the outside. Avoid ductless,



**focus on energy™**

*The power is within you.*

recirculating units because they cannot control moisture or pollutants. In bathrooms, make sure the fan vents directly to the outside, not into an attic or crawlspace.

- Ensure all fans are ducted properly to the outside. Use rigid ductwork to avoid collapses and install ductwork in the shortest, most direct route possible. Avoid elbows and bends when possible and terminate ducts properly through the roof or walls instead of into the attic or soffit.
- In new homes, locate heating and cooling registers as far as is practical from exhaust vents to minimize the amount of heated or cooled air that is exhausted when the fan runs.
- Use timers and humidity sensors to run fans when they are needed.

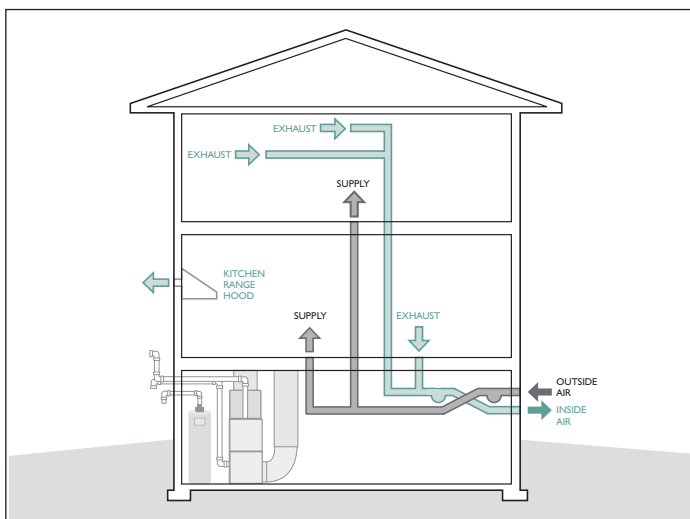
Spot-ventilation systems should be viewed not just as fans, but as systems that include ductwork and termination fittings. They are both critical components and have the greatest impact on fan performance.

#### Whole-house ventilation

Whole-house, or central ventilation systems, use one or more fans and duct systems to exhaust stale air and/or supply fresh air throughout the house. These systems come in several types:

**Balanced.** This system usually consists of two fans and two duct systems—for supplying fresh outside air and exhausting stale indoor air. Fresh outside air is introduced in equal quantity to the amount of stale inside air being exhausted. This system should be tested and rebalanced after installation to ensure balanced airflow.

**Balanced with heat recovery/energy recovery.** This system adds a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) and heat recovery core



**A balanced ventilation system brings in fresh outside air in equal quantities to the amount of stale inside air that is exhausted. The furnace and water heater in the diagram are vented directly to the outside and do not use indoor air in the combustion process.**

or an energy recovery ventilator (ERV) and energy recovery core to a balanced system. The HRV recovers heat from the outgoing exhaust air and uses it to warm the incoming fresh air. An ERV recovers moisture as well as heat from the outgoing air (in the heating season). This type of system helps reduce the costs of heating and cooling your home.

**Exhaust only.** This system uses fans to exhaust stale indoor air, but supplies fresh outdoor air passively through intentional or unintentional openings in the building envelope. Often, a bathroom fan controlled by a remote timer or dehumidistat is used to provide continuous ventilation in this system. Because the fan may run for long periods of time, it is important that it be quiet, with a maximum noise rating of 1.0 sone—equivalent to a new refrigerator when it is running.

**Supply only.** This system uses fans to draw in fresh outdoor air and push out stale indoor air through openings in the building envelope. This approach is generally not recommended for cold climates without thorough design and operational considerations.

#### CONTROLS FOR YOUR VENTILATION SYSTEM

Ventilation systems may be purchased with either manual or automatic controls. Manual controls require the occupant to activate the system, while automatic controls can be set to operate the system based on time of day, occupancy, humidity levels, and other parameters. All controls should be easily accessible and user friendly.

##### Manual controls

The most basic manual control is an on/off switch. Other controls include:

**Delay-off timer.** This is a switch activated by the occupant that allows a fan to operate for 20 minutes or more before turning off automatically. These timers are useful in bathrooms where it is important to continue removing moisture after the occupant has finished showering.

**Timer.** A timer control allows occupants to set the time duration for which the ventilation system will operate.

##### Automatic controls

These controls can be fully or semi automatic (i.e., include an override switch) and fall into the following categories:

**Automatic timers.** Programmable timers that can be used much like setback thermostats to run fans during times when there is likely to be a greater need for ventilation.

**Humidity sensors (de-humidistat).** These controls turn ventilation systems on and off when relative humidity reaches a certain level.

## OPERATING GUIDELINES

Proper operation and maintenance of your ventilation system is important to you and your home. If your home is new, you may have to run the ventilation system more often for the first year or two. This will remove the moisture and gases emitted from the construction materials, carpets, and furnishings. In general, you'll want to:

- Use a hygrometer to measure indoor humidity and adjust your ventilating strategy to keep winter humidity levels at 30 to 35 percent
- Clean fans regularly
- Clean intake openings regularly
- Examine and clean exhaust vents and dampers
- Replace filters as needed

## HOW MUCH FRESH AIR DO WE NEED?

HVAC and indoor air-quality professionals talk in terms of air changes per hour (ACH) and cubic feet per minute (cfm) when specifying ventilation systems. In their latest standard, the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) 62.2-2007, recommends ventilation rates for whole-house and spot ventilation.

Wisconsin's building code requires spot-exhaust ventilation in bathrooms, but does not stipulate an overall ventilation rate for homes. The Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes Program requires its certified new homes to comply with ASHRAE 62.2-2007. This ensures that each certified home is equipped with a ventilation system(s) that meets or exceeds the latest standards for residential construction.

### Signs of inadequate ventilation

- Do you notice lingering odors, musty smells, stale or stuffy air?
- Do you have mold or mildew in closets, or on ceilings or exterior walls?
- Is there condensation on the insides of your windows, or do you see other signs of excessive humidity?
- Do you feel better when you are outside of your home?

If you are concerned about inadequate ventilation in your home, or if you are planning a remodeling project (which could alter the indoor air characteristics of your home), work with a consultant partnering with Home Performance with ENERGY STAR. These consultants can conduct tests to determine your home's air leakage, combustion safety, and other conditions affecting your home's air quality. Visit [focusenergy.com](http://focusenergy.com) to find a consultant in your area.

## VENTILATION SYSTEMS AND COMBUSTION EQUIPMENT SAFETY

Exhaust equipment, including spot ventilation fans, whole-house exhaust-only ventilation systems, clothes dryers and other exhaust fans exhaust indoor air. If enough outside

### WHAT ABOUT YOUR ATTACHED GARAGE?

An attached garage can be a significant source of pollutants, especially carbon monoxide. To minimize exposure to pollutants from an attached garage:

- Seal air leaks between your home and garage to minimize the amount of air from the garage that could seep into your home.
- Never idle cars in the garage. Instead, start the car and immediately back out.
- Do not operate small engines or work with high VOC compounds in your garage.
- Install carbon monoxide detectors in your home.

The best strategy is to keep garage pollutants from entering the home. Once in the home, they will have to be removed, often requiring more ventilation than currently provided. A balanced ventilation system is less likely to pull fumes and other pollutants from the garage into the house. Exhaust-only ventilation systems put more emphasis on the garage wall connection to the home.

air is not brought in, to replace the exhausted air, the house becomes depressurized. In a depressurized house, combustion gases from standard combustion equipment (furnace, water heater, fireplace, etc.) can be pulled back into the house rather than exhausting out the chimney. This condition is called backdrafting and can cause severe injury or even death.

### How to avoid backdrafting

- Replace standard combustion furnaces with closed-combustion equipment, and replace atmospherically-vented water heaters with power-vented models. Closed-combustion equipment uses the ducts to push the combustion air and the flue gases directly to the outside.
- Before installing a ventilation system, have a consultant partnering with Home Performance with ENERGY STAR check to ensure your home has adequate combustion air for your combustion equipment. Have the system checked after installation and after making any structural changes to your house.
- Install carbon monoxide detectors as an added warning system—see Focus on Energy's fact sheet on carbon monoxide (downloadable from our Information Center at [focusenergy.com](http://focusenergy.com)) for more information.

## **LEARN MORE**

### **Focus on Energy**

Wisconsin's statewide resource for energy efficiency and renewable energy offers information, services and financial incentives to help residents and businesses save energy and money. Visit our Web site to download helpful fact sheets about building a new home, remodeling an existing home, controlling moisture problems, reducing the risks of carbon monoxide, selecting energy efficient appliances, heating and cooling systems, and more.

**[focusonenergy.com](http://focusonenergy.com)**

### **The official ENERGY STAR Web site**

A joint effort of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy, this site offers valuable information about energy efficient products and practices.

**[energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov)**

### **The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

Visit this page to learn more about maintaining healthier indoor air quality at home.

**[epa.gov/iaq/homes/index.html](http://epa.gov/iaq/homes/index.html)**

### **Home Ventilating Institute**

This organization tests and certifies residential ventilation products to ensure proper ventilation and maximum indoor air quality, resulting in healthy, energy efficient homes.

**[hvi.org](http://hvi.org)**

### **New York State Energy Research and Development Authority**

Download the free Homeowner's Guide to Ventilation for a helpful introduction to the basics of home ventilation.

**[nyseda.org/publications/guide.pdf](http://nyseda.org/publications/guide.pdf)**

