Many people assume that there is little they can do to significantly reduce their energy use and increase the efficiency of their homes. In reality, there are many things that typical residents can do themselves and many other things they can hire others to do. Before embarking on home energy improvements, especially large projects, the Minnesota Department of Commerce strongly recommends having an advanced home energy assessment, or home energy audit.

An assessment of how your house is functioning can help you decide what needs fixing, what needs upgrading, and what needs replacement. It will identify some simple low-cost measures you can take, such as weather-stripping doors or sealing air leaks, and it will determine more expensive but cost-effective measures, such as adding insulation to attics or walls and replacing furnaces or water heaters.

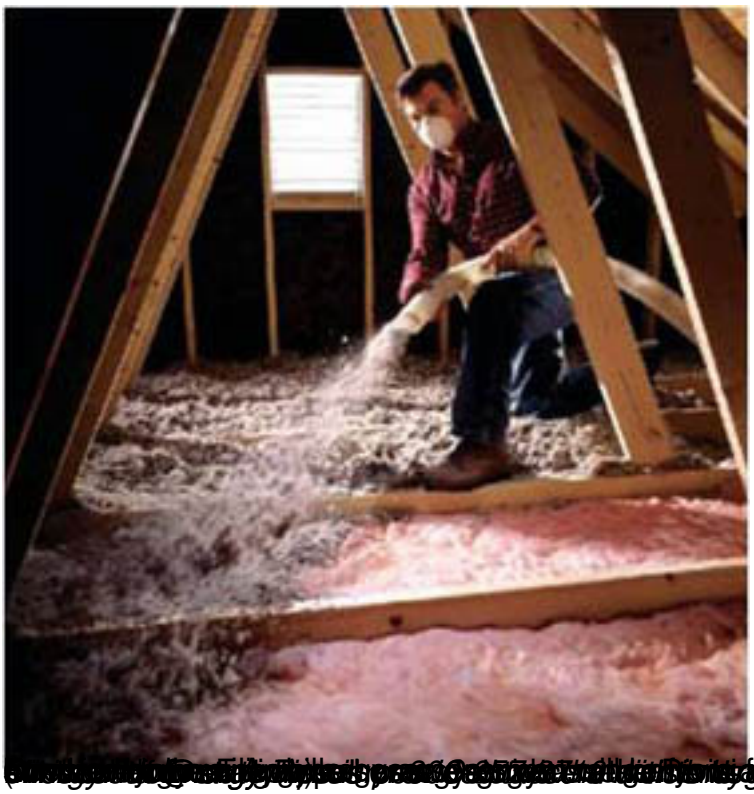
An advanced energy assessment should include the following:

• A thorough visual inspection for attic, wall, crawlspace, foundation, basement, window, door, and roof problems.

• A review of energy bills to help assess home performance and identify savings opportunities.

• A blower-door test to determine air leakage.

• Infrared scans to detect insulation levels and sources of air leaks.

• Efficiency and safety testing for combustion appliances.

Contact your gas or electric utility to arrange an advanced energy assessment. The Minnesota Building Performance Association also offers a list of energy auditors at www.mbpa.us.