Cavity Wall Insulation
A Homeowner’s Guide

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CAVITY WALL INSULATION?

Around one third of all the heat lost in an uninsulated home goes through the external walls. Cavity wall insulation is one of the most effective energy saving measures that many people can carry out on their homes.

Filling the cavities in masonry cavity walls with insulation reduces heat loss from your home, resulting in lower fuel bills. Reduced energy use is also better for the environment.

WHAT IS A CAVITY WALL?

A cavity wall is an external wall of a building that consists of two layers separated by a gap (a cavity).

Masonry (brick or block) cavity wall construction was the most common form of construction for houses built in Scotland between 1920 and 1980. However, many other types of construction were also used during this period.

WHAT IS CAVITY WALL INSULATION?

There are a number of different types of cavity wall insulation; however, some can only be installed when the wall is being constructed. This leaflet only deals with installing insulation into the wall cavities of existing houses.

The two main types of insulation suitable for installing into the cavity of an existing house are:

- Mineral wool (rock wool or glass wool)
- Bonded Polystyrene Beads

The insulation is normally installed from the outside, so there is rarely any disruption to the occupants of the house.

Agrément Certificates for the various cavity wall insulation systems can be downloaded from the British Board of Agrément (BBA) website.

IS MY HOME SUITABLE FOR CAVITY WALL INSULATION?

This leaflet only covers the suitability of cavity wall insulation in masonry cavity walls. Other types of construction may be suitable but specialist advice should be obtained. The cavities to timber frame houses for example should not be insulated due to the risk of the timber rotting.

There are a few simple checks that you can make to help you identify if cavity wall insulation is suitable for your home. The guidance below provides information to assist you in this.

DOES MY HOME HAVE MASONRY CAVITY WALLS?

It can sometimes be difficult to tell what the construction of an external wall is, especially if the wall is rendered. If external brickwork is visible, can end bricks be seen? The presence of end bricks would generally indicate that you do not have a cavity wall.

ARE THE WALLS EXPOSED TO WIND DRIVEN RAIN?

Un-rendered walls that are regularly subjected to severe wind driven rain are not usually suitable for cavity wall insulation. Wind driven rain is more severe in the west of Scotland; however, localised effects on your house should be taken into account.

THIS LEAFLET OFFERS GUIDANCE ON:

- The benefits of cavity wall insulation
- What a cavity wall is
- What cavity wall insulation is
- Whether your home is suitable for cavity wall insulation
- How to choose a cavity wall insulation installer

Scottish Building Standards
WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF THE EXTERNAL WALLS?
The external wall should be in good condition before cavity wall insulation is installed. For example, cracks in the render (roughcast, pebbledash, etc), cracked or spalled brickwork or eroded mortar may allow water into the cavity that can be carried across any insulation to the inner leaf.

If the render is loose or coming away from the brickwork this should be repaired before, or immediately after, the cavities are insulated. You can check for loose render by gently tapping the render with a coin and listening for a hollow sound.

Gutters, downpipes, flashings, etc should all be in good order.

If there is any evidence of dampness entering the house the problem should be sorted out before any insulation is installed.

WAS MY HOME BUILT WITH CAVITY WALL INSULATION?
Houses with masonry cavity walls built from the late nineties usually had cavity wall insulation installed at the time they were built. However, some houses built earlier than this may have full or partial fill cavity insulation. Even if the cavities are only partially filled additional insulation should not be installed.

It is unlikely that you will be able to tell whether the existing walls were built with cavity wall insulation without physically looking into the cavity. However, the installing firm will be able to assess whether the cavity contains any insulation with the use of a borescope. They will also be able to determine the size, cleanliness and suitability of the cavity at this time.

HOW IS CAVITY WALL INSULATION INSTALLED?
The installer drills a series of small holes about 1.35m (4½ feet) apart to the outside of the house. Insulation is then blown into the cavity. The holes will then be filled to match, as close as possible, the existing wall.

CAN I INSTALL CAVITY WALL INSULATION MYSELF?
No, installing cavity wall insulation is not a job that you can do yourself. You should use an approved and registered insulation installer. The BBA, National Insulation Association (NIA) or the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency (CiGA) can provide installer contact details (see contacts).

APPROVED/REGISTERED INSTALLERS
After you contact an installer the first person to visit your property may not be an assessor. This person may only be investigating your interest and therefore will not carry out a full assessment of your property.

Once you agree for work to be carried out a full assessment will be carried out either prior to the installers arriving or by the installation team before works start. The installation company’s assessment will assess your home to ensure that it is suitable to have cavity wall installation installed.

The installer will use materials and systems that are tested, assessed and approved by the BBA. After completion CiGA will post a 25 year guarantee directly to your home.

BUILDING REGULATIONS
A building warrant is not required to install cavity wall insulation in your house. However, any cavity insulation work carried out must comply with building standards.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER
Installing cavity wall insulation may make your house more airtight. While this can be a good thing as it reduces draughts, it could also affect appliances that need air, for example an open fire. In such cases specialist advice may be required to check whether a ventilator needs to be installed.

CAN I GET A GRANT FOR THE WORK?
A grant may be available for some or all of the costs of installing cavity wall insulation. The Energy Saving Trust (Scotland) or NIA Installer members will be able to advise you on this.

CONTACT DETAILS
Building Standards Division, Scottish Government
www.scotland.gov.uk/bsd
Energy Saving Trust
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk
National Insulation Association
www.nationalinsulationassociation.org.uk
The Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency
www.ciga.co.uk
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
www.rics.org
The British Board of Agrément
www.bbacerts.co.uk/