



Heat factor

Metal blinds absorb sun's warmth, putting a damper on energy costs

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NOVEMBER 28, 2009

A new line of window coverings could help keep you toasty warm this winter.

SolarChoice vertical blinds consist of heat-absorbing aluminum inserts inside plastic sleeves. When the sun's rays strike the blind, the metal warms, creating a natural convection that draws cool air from the bottom and passes heated air out the top.

They won't heat your home on their own, but with air exiting from the top reported to be 48C to 60C and no energy required to operate them, they could be a valuable addition to your green home arsenal.

Testing at the University of Minnesota shows the blinds produce over five BTUs of heat per square inch of window glass, says the blinds' inventor, Keith McKinzie. On a standard bedroom window, that would be roughly 4,300 BTUs. A 5,000 BTU portable heater will service a room of about 200 square feet.

The company says the blinds, which it calls "heaters" and can be used in any type of window, can reduce heating costs by up to 35 per cent.

Available at www.solarchoiceblinds.com, a blind for that standard bedroom window would cost

about \$255 U.S. The product, which can be mounted inside or outside the window, comes with a limited lifetime warranty.

McKinzie says he's been tinkering with solar energy for years.

"In our first home, I tried putting black trash bags over the curtain rungs in the living room."

His sense of esthetics, and his technological know-how, have since improved.

Remember, though, that to benefit from the blinds, they need to be closed, meaning you lose your view from that window.

As well, you couldn't use them to shield your home from the summer sun unless you want to live in a greenhouse.

The blinds, made of a non-yellowing plastic, work best in a south-facing window where the sun's heat is greatest, McKinzie says.

Last year in his own home, he adds, "We saw a drastic decrease in our fuel bill."

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