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Department of Commerce warns of salespeople pitching energy savings from radiant barriers

Due diligence urged in seeking most cost-effective energy improvements

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For Immediate Release:

SAINT PAUL, MN – The Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources has issued an alert to consumers who are considering the purchase of radiant barriers in their attics. The Commerce Department, which has received recent reports of salespeople pitching the radiant barrier product in flyers and at free dinners throughout Minnesota, warns consumers that radiant barriers are not a cost-effective way to reduce heating or cooling loads in Minnesota.

“Radiant barriers in attics may be valid for homes in southern states,” said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman, “but they save very little energy in Minnesota homes.”

Radiant barriers consist of a reflective film, usually aluminum, laid over the top of attic insulation in existing homes. They are sold as an energy-saving product, with claims of significant reductions in both heating and cooling costs. However, their potential benefit is primarily in reducing air-conditioning cooling loads in warm or hot climates and in buildings with little or no insulation.

A [Radiant Barrier Fact Sheet](#) compiled by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory for the U.S. Department of Energy shows that the benefits of radiant barriers decrease significantly as one travels north. In southern cities like Miami, Fla., or Austin, Texas, radiant barriers could reduce one’s utility bill by as much as \$150 per year using average residential electricity prices. But by the time you reach colder climate states such as Minnesota, where air-conditioning loads are considerably less, savings drop to only \$10 to \$40 a year. If there are no ducts or air handlers in the attic, the savings are much less.

So, consumers need to be aware that with the price of installation for a radiant barrier is \$2,000 or more with a savings of \$20 per year, it would take 100 years to pay back the investment. It is also important to note that radiant barrier products have negligible benefit in reducing heating costs. It is unlikely that most Minnesota consumers would realize any measurable energy savings from radiant barriers in attics.

“We strongly urge all consumers to be cautious, conduct due diligence, and explore other proven means to make their homes and businesses more energy efficient,” said Rothman. “Don’t be misled by ‘deals’ or ‘pilot programs’ available for a limited time only. Get input and bids from at least three contractors, and make sure those contractors are reputable.”

The U.S. Department of Energy and the Minnesota Department of Commerce agree that, in Minnesota, implementing air sealing and adding conventional attic insulation would be considerably cheaper and much more effective for saving energy than installing a radiant barrier. In fact, as attic insulation levels increase, the potential benefits from a radiant barrier decrease. Getting a home energy assessment through your gas or electric utility is also encouraged as a first step to identifying cost-effective energy improvements.

For more information on insulation and other energy-efficient measures to improve your home, contact the Division of Energy Resources at 800-657-3710 or 651-296-5175 or visit <http://mn.gov/commerce/energy>. The website offers free downloadable home energy guides, including the “[Home Envelope](#)” consumer guide that includes information on energy efficiency and choosing a contractor.