Energy Savings: Attics
by Kristine Solomon, Posted Aug 2nd 2010 1:00PM
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Cool off this notoriously stuffy space with helpful hints from the U.S. Green Building Council.

With the sun beating down on it and heat rising, the attic can be the hottest room in the house. In fact, the temperature in the attic can climb to a stifling 150 degrees on a hot day in the summer, which can increase cooling costs by 40 percent. Sweating yet? Here are a few ways to cool things down up there.

1. Add Insulation
Your attic should have R-22 insulation -- "7 inches of fiberglass or rock wool, or 6 inches of cellulose," say our friends over at Green Home Guide. If it doesn't have enough, add more. The U.S. Department of Energy's website will help you know what's best in your region.

2. Seal Openings in the Attic's Envelope
Insulation is important, but before you go about it, make sure all the openings in the attic's envelope are sealed. That means sealing around vents, plumbing, recessed lights, and windows. Green Home Guide suggested laying down a 6-mil polyethylene vapor barrier. But make sure to take precautions against fire: Don't cover or pack insulation around electrical fixtures, bare stove pipes, or anything else that produces heat -- unless a label on the fixture indicates it's safe for direct contact with insulation.

3. Ventilate
Ventilation is important in every room, but especially in the attic. Lower attic temperatures by about 10 degrees by installing gable vents. Lower temps even more by installing a ridge-and- soffit ventilation system.
4. Re-Roof the Right Way
If you've decided to overhaul the roof, make sure to install white or pale-colored shingles as opposed to dark ones, which attract a substantial amount of heat from the sun.

*This information is courtesy of the U.S. Green Building Council. For more tips on saving energy and greening your home, visit USGBC's Green Home Guide.*