



Highlights: Window Installers

For those ready to replace old, drafty windows, **Puget Sound Consumers' Checkbook**, available at www.checkbook.org, warns to shop for windows and a good installer with care. Checkbook rates local window installation companies for both price and quality of service and gives advice on choosing type and quality of windows, whether for replacement or for new installations. Highlights from the article include:

- Checkbook's shoppers gathered quotes for several window replacement jobs and found significant price differences among installers for the same specific job. For one carefully specified replacement job, for example, Checkbook found a price range from \$1,720 to \$4,854 among local companies.
- There are a lot of unhappy customers of window installers. Some companies were rated "inferior" overall by 25 percent or more of their surveyed customers. But there are also some very highly rated installers.
- You're unlikely to recover the cost of replacement windows from the resulting energy savings. High-performance windows come with high price tags. While the most efficient windows will lower your utility bills, the savings likely won't add up to pay for the project—even over a long period of time.
- For one sample house (2,600 square-foot frame house in Seattle with typical shade and moderate window areas with windows equally oriented north, east, south, and west), Checkbook estimated that installing some of the most energy-efficient windows available would result in energy savings of only about \$445 per year.
- On the other hand, many consumers will want replacement windows for reasons other than energy savings, such as comfort, appearance, ease of cleaning, or concern for the environment. Key considerations are how long you will be living in your house; how much the windows may boost resale value, and how much you value the comfort and appearance new windows will provide.

To get a good price on windows:

- Have several installers come to your home, measure, recommend a replacement method, recommend a brand and model of window, explain the reasons for their recommendations, and quote prices.
- Discuss these recommendations and ask about lower-priced alternatives. If substantially lower prices would be available for less energy-efficient windows, ask the companies to estimate the actual energy savings the more expensive windows will produce—and insist that they provide detailed information on how they calculate these estimates.
- Decide on your final specifications. Call the companies that already provided estimates and others to get their prices for these final specifications. Get a final written proposal from each company.
- If you are not confident that the quality of the windows themselves is comparable from company to company when the companies quote only on specifications, have the companies quote on a specific brand and model; several companies are likely to quote on some of the same brands and models.
- If you are remodeling and will be putting windows into roughed-in openings, consider having the contractor doing the other construction work purchase and install your windows, rather than dealing with a specialized window installation outfit. Window installation companies are primarily geared to installing replacement frames rather than new construction jobs.

- Check whether government programs or your utility company offer rebates or low-interest loans for installing energy-efficient windows. At the time of this writing, a federal tax credit is available for new windows installed in primary residences that meet or exceed Energy Star program requirements. The credit is 10 percent of the cost of the windows (it doesn't cover installation costs), with a max credit of \$200 per window or skylight, and up to \$500 per door. The total maximum credit is \$500 per family.
- An excellent resource to find incentives for all types of energy-efficiency solutions is the Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency (www.dsireusa.org).

The media may cite selected examples of top-rated window installers, as shown in Puget Sound Consumers' Checkbook, and Checkbook's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.

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