Simple Home Upgrades to Improve Comfort and Value

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Abstract

Improving the comfort and value of your home does not always require major renovations or expensive investments. This guide explores straightforward and practical upgrades that can make a significant difference in how you experience your living space while increasing its market appeal. From enhancing insulation and upgrading heating systems to making small but effective changes to your home's appearance and functionality, these simple strategies can help you create a more enjoyable and valuable home environment. Whether you are preparing to sell, rent, or simply want to enjoy your home more, this guide provides actionable advice to get started.

Getting Started

Before making any upgrades it is important to understand the current condition of your home and identify the areas that could benefit most from improvement. Start by observing the comfort levels in different rooms noting places that are too cold, too warm, or have drafts. Take stock of energy bills to see where you might save on heating or cooling costs. Consider also the visual appeal of your home such as worn surfaces or areas that look outdated. With this information you can prioritize upgrades that will have the greatest impact both on your daily comfort and the overall value of your property. This guide will walk you through practical and affordable options so you can begin enhancing your home with confidence.

Enhancing Thermal Comfort with Insulation and Sealing

Proper insulation and effective sealing of your home play a crucial role in maintaining comfortable indoor temperatures throughout the year. According to the Energy Smart Housing Manual by Sustainability Victoria, insulation helps to reduce heat loss during colder months and keeps heat out during warmer seasons. This creates a more stable and pleasant indoor environment while reducing the need for excessive heating or cooling.

Sealing gaps and cracks around windows, doors, and other openings prevents unwanted drafts that can cause discomfort and lead to higher energy bills. By minimizing the infiltration of cold or hot air, sealing works hand in hand with insulation to improve overall energy efficiency.

Together, insulation and sealing help create a home that stays warm in winter and cool in summer. This not only enhances your living comfort but also contributes to lower energy consumption, reducing both costs and environmental impact.

Energy Smart Housing Manual

If you're building or renovating your home, make the most of your investment by incorporating energy efficiency into the design.

Investing in good design as early as possible will provide a home with increased comfort levels year-round and offer the opportunity to save on water and energy bills now and into the future. The Energy Smart Housing Manual will help you comply with the 6 Star Standard regulations or exceed minimum standards and reduce construction costs.

Who will find the Energy Smart Housing Manual useful?

This is a resource for prospective home builders, renovators, builders, local councils and students to use as a guide. The manual illustrates sustainable home design – incorporating building practices – and allow users to create a comfortable and high-quality home.

Before building or renovating, this manual will equip you with the knowledge to take to builders and designers.

What is the Energy Smart Housing Manual?

The Energy Smart Housing Manual is a comprehensive and easy to read manual that explains six key energy efficiency concepts specific to Victorian regulations and climate conditions, and how incorporating these design guidelines will contribute to greater energy efficiency to maximise comfort levels year-round.

The six key concepts

Sun and climate
Understand how the position of the sun and Victoria's different climates affect the energy needs and comfort of your home.

Siting
Provides guidelines on siting your home on the block to maximise Winter warmth, regulate Summer heat and improve solar access.

Windows
How window size, position and window coverings affect energy efficiency.

Insulation
Understand the properties of different types of insulation for different parts of the building and best practice installation.

Thermal mass
How thermal mass affects energy efficiency and guidance on how to make best use of thermal mass in a building.

Air leakage and movement
How to control unwanted air leakage and save energy.

Upgrading to Energy Efficient Heating and Cooling Systems

Upgrading your home's heating and cooling systems to more energy-efficient models can greatly enhance comfort while reducing energy costs. The Premier of Victoria highlights that families who invest in modern, efficient systems can save significantly on their energy bills and contribute to environmental sustainability.

Benefits of Energy Efficient Systems

Energy-efficient heating and cooling units use less electricity or gas to achieve the desired temperature. This means your home stays comfortable without wasting energy. These systems often include smart thermostats and advanced technologies that optimize performance throughout the day.

Types of Energy-Efficient Systems

Common upgrades include reverse cycle air conditioners, heat pumps, and high-efficiency gas heaters. Reverse cycle air conditioners provide both heating and cooling, making them versatile for year-round comfort. Heat pumps use renewable energy from the air, making them one of the most eco-friendly options available.

- **Reverse Cycle Air Conditioners**
  Reverse cycle air conditioners are highly popular because they provide both heating and cooling in a single unit. They work by extracting heat from the outside air and transferring it indoors during winter and reversing the process to cool your home in summer. These systems are known for their efficiency and ability to maintain a consistent indoor temperature year-round.
- **Heat Pumps**
  Heat pumps are similar to reverse cycle air conditioners but often designed with even greater efficiency in mind. They use electricity to move heat rather than generate it, which means they can provide up to four times more heating or cooling energy than the electricity they consume. Heat pumps are considered one of the most environmentally friendly options because they use renewable energy from the air.
- **High-Efficiency Gas Heaters**
  For those who prefer gas heating, modern high-efficiency gas heaters can provide warmth with less fuel consumption compared to older models. These heaters use improved technology to extract more heat from the gas burned, reducing energy waste and lowering emissions.

Choosing the right system depends on your home's size, location, and your personal preferences. Consulting with a qualified professional can help you find the most suitable energy-efficient heating and cooling solution.

Long-Term Savings and Environmental Impact

Though upgrading may require an upfront investment, the reduction in energy use leads to lower utility bills over time. Additionally, energy-efficient systems produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions, helping Victoria meet its sustainability goals.

More Victorian families are slashing their power bills by upgrading to energy-efficient heating and cooling thanks to the Allan Labor Government's Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) program.

Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio today announced 99,000 households have used the program this year, with participation on track to exceed 170,000 by the end of 2025.

These upgrades are helping Victorians stay warm in winter, cool in summer and take control of their energy costs.

More than 41,000 households have already accessed discounted heating and cooling upgrades in 2025, saving households up to $5,530 on the cost of upgrading appliances and more than $1,000 on their annual energy bill.

So far this year more than 18,000 households have upgraded their inefficient gas water heating to electric, saving them up to $330 off their energy bills annually.

Hot water systems are one of the most popular upgrades, with savings of up to $2,030 available off the cost of installing a locally made energy-efficient hot water system when you combine a Solar Victoria rebate and a Victorian Energy Upgrades discount.

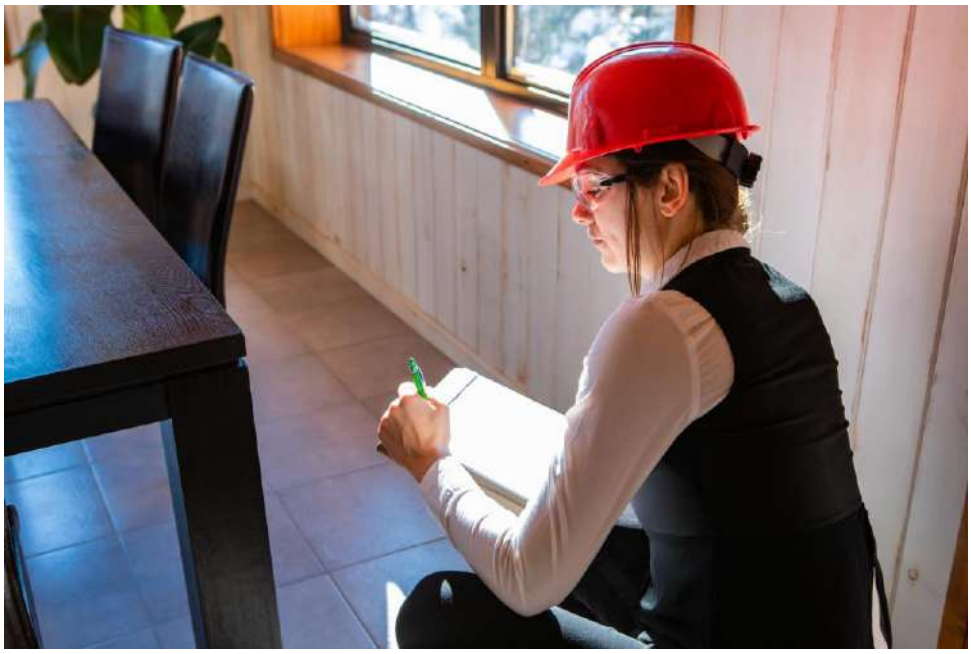
A new all- electric home with solar can save up to $1,820 a year on energy bills. An existing home can save around $2,000 annually by going all- electric with solar.

Last year the VEU saved households almost $54 million off their energy bills, putting money back in the pocket of Victorian families.

Victorians can access discounts on a wide range of upgrades including reverse cycle air conditioners, heat pump hot water systems, induction cooktops, weather sealing and more.

We're also undertaking a Strategic Review of the program to make it easier for Victorians and businesses to get involved and start saving money on their energy bills, findings of the review have been submitted, and the government is now considering our response.

Implementing Draught Proofing Measures



Draught proofing is one of the simplest and most effective ways to improve your home's energy efficiency. By sealing gaps and cracks around windows, doors, and floors, you can prevent cold air from entering and warm air from escaping. This not only helps maintain a comfortable indoor temperature but also reduces heating costs.

In addition to sealing common draught points, paying attention to areas like tile grout lines can also contribute to a well-sealed home environment. Over time, grout can become cracked or dirty, allowing moisture and air to seep through, which may affect the overall comfort and efficiency of your home.

For practical tips on restoring and maintaining grout, you can explore this helpful guide on making a homemade tile grout cleaner:

Worry not! Here is the list of the best homemade tile grout cleaners you can prepare and use without a hint of stress. Professionals often use some of these products for a cheap end of lease cleaning Melbourne. You can achieve spotless tile grout at home with the right approach and proper products.

1. What is Tile Grout & Why Does It get dull and Dingy?

White grout is between the tiled floors and walls. It is a porous and delicate material that easily attracts dirt, soap residue, moisture, grease and mould. Kitchen and bathroom areas are often prone to grout stains and dullness due to excess water and dirt exposure. This can make them look dirty and dingy. Over time, black mould spores can build up that can cause damage to your tiled surfaces.

Fortunately, regular cleaning and maintenance can make a world of difference. You can make them look as good as new using the following cleaning recipes.

2. Baking Soda and Warm Water Tile Grout Cleaner

Start with the basics! Instead of going fancy, opt for a staple natural cleaning product, i.e. baking soda. It is mildly abrasive and can dislodge gunk and grease between the grout lines without causing any damage. Prepare a thick paste by adding a teaspoon of warm water to 2 tablespoons of baking soda in a bowl.

Now, dip a soft-bristled brush (an old toothbrush) into the paste and apply it over your discoloured tile grout. Gently scrub in a circular motion and leave it for a few minutes before rinsing or wiping with a damp cloth. This homemade cleaning solution can help you achieve spotless results in no time.

Tip: Dry the surface to prevent moisture buildup.

3. The Power of Hydrogen Peroxide and Baking Soda

There is no denying that hydrogen peroxide is one of the most effective eco-friendly natural cleaning products for mould removal. It is a great alternative to bleach and other cleaning chemicals. You can increase the effectiveness by adding baking soda. It works as a mildly abrasive agent to dislodge mould, mildew, grease and gunk from tile grout.

Here is a quick recipe:

- ¼ cup hydrogen peroxide
- ½ cup baking soda
- 1 teaspoon mild dishwashing liquid

Mix all ingredients and apply them over the affected area (grout lines) using a toothbrush. Scrub in a circular motion. Hydrogen peroxide can effectively cut through grease and mould spores without leaving any dullness behind.

However, if you are preparing the entire property for the final rental inspection, book experts for a budget end of lease cleaning Melbourne and retrieve your bond money without any dispute.

4. Castile Soap Grout Cleaner Recipe

This is also one of the best homemade grout cleaners to achieve gleaming tile grout lines. Castile Soap is a plant-based product that lifts grime and gunk from porous or delicate surfaces without causing any damage. Add half a cup of baking soda in 2 tablespoons of castile soap liquid and ¼ cup of warm water to create a DIY cleaning solution.

Mix and apply it to your dirty grout lines and allow the mixture to sit for 10 minutes. Next, scrub thoroughly with a sponge and rinse with warm water. Don't forget to wipe dry to prevent mould re-growth. The best part is that this DIY agent can remove brown stains from

your toilet and mould from air vents, counters, faucets and other areas without releasing toxic fumes.

5. White Vinegar Solution

White vinegar is a mild acid and can effectively break down gunk, soap scum, mould and grease from your tiles and grout lines. Ensure you use the diluted form to prevent damage. Mix equal parts of vinegar and warm water and spray it over the affected area. Allow the solution to sit for 10 minutes or until you scrub with a sponge or brush. Rinse and wipe dry the area for a spotless shine.

6. Prepare a Homemade Grout Cleaner with Soda Crystals

Washing soda or soda crystals can transform dull grout lines into shiny surfaces. Add half a cup of soda crystals to one gallon of warm water and clean your dull grout surface. Let it sit for a few minutes until you scrub it with a brush. You can use soda crystals for house cleaning, including walls, oven racks, faucets, sinks, countertops and other grime-laden surfaces without causing any damage.

You can also book end of lease cleaning Melbourne experts for a thorough sprucing of every nook and cranny, including tile grout, for clean and shiny appearance before the final rental inspection. This can leave a great impression on your landlords, helping you retrieve full bond money.

Wrapping Up

Follow this guide and prepare the best homemade tile grout cleaners using natural, plant-based, eco-friendly products. Ensure you regularly clean your bathroom and kitchen tiles to prevent grout dullness and deterioration.

Transitioning to All Electric Homes

With rising cost-of-living pressures, many Victorians are looking for ways to save money on their bills.

The good news is that all-electric homes save hundreds of dollars a year in energy bills. Plus, they are healthier to live in and are better for the environment.

Savings for existing homes

Converting an existing home with solar panels from gas to electricity can save around $2,000 a year on energy bills. This is in addition to around $740 of savings each year from an existing 6.6 kW solar system.

Savings for new homes

Going all-electric puts around $880 per year back in the pockets of new-homeowners, or approximately $1,820 with solar installed. A new Victorian detached home which has been built all-electric, will spend around $2,070 on energy bills compared to a new dual-fuel home which will spend around $2,950 on energy bills.

Switching to an all-electric home is an increasingly popular way to reduce household emissions and lower energy costs while improving overall energy efficiency. Energy Victoria highlights that moving away from gas and other fossil fuels to electricity, especially when paired with renewable energy sources, offers numerous benefits for both homeowners and the environment.

Now you know that all-electric homes are the gold standard – saving you money and making your home greener – you might be wondering how to make the final move away from gas.

Here are 4 simple steps to start your journey to total home electrification:

1. Make a list

Make a list of all the appliances that you run on gas.

2. Book a Scorecard Assessment

Consider booking a Residential Scorecard Assessment. This will help you plan your move away from gas to a cleaner, greener – and cheaper – home.

Discounted Scorecard assessments are now available under the Victorian Energy Upgrades program. Contact your local assessor for more information.

You can also visit the SEC's How To Go Electric page for a DIY electric home planner tool.

3. Consider your budget

Determine your budget and prioritise the most energy-intensive appliances to electrify.

When major gas appliances, such as gas heating or hot water systems reach the end of their life, it's a great time to consider upgrading them with an efficient electric option through the Victorian Energy Upgrades program.

4. Find out about available discounts and rebates

Visit the Victorian Energy Upgrades program to find out more about discounts.

Also, visit the Solar Homes Program to learn about rebates for solar PV systems and hot water and loans for solar batteries for eligible households.

If you've decided to electrify, you may also be wondering if you need to upgrade to 3-phase power or improve your switchboard to handle the increased load. Our guide will help you determine the best course of action for your household's electrical needs.

Benefits of Going All-Electric

One of the primary advantages of an all-electric home is the significant reduction in carbon emissions. By eliminating gas appliances such as heaters, cooktops, and hot water systems, households can lower their reliance on fossil fuels, contributing to cleaner air and combating climate change. Additionally, electric appliances can be powered by renewable energy sources such as solar panels, further reducing the environmental footprint.

Electric systems also offer improved safety by eliminating risks associated with gas leaks or carbon monoxide poisoning. Many modern electric appliances are designed to be highly efficient, which helps to reduce energy consumption and household utility bills.

Key Appliances for Transition

Transitioning to an all-electric home involves upgrading several key appliances. Heat pumps, including reverse cycle air conditioners, are a highly efficient option for both heating and cooling. They use less electricity than traditional electric heaters and provide year-round comfort.

Electric cooktops and ovens offer precise temperature control and faster heating times compared to gas. Induction cooktops, in particular, are popular for their safety features and energy efficiency.

Electric hot water systems, such as heat pump water heaters or solar hot water systems, can replace gas heaters to provide reliable hot water with lower running costs and reduced emissions.

Incentives and Support Programs

Victoria offers various programs and rebates to support homeowners in making the switch to all-electric homes. These incentives can help offset the initial cost of purchasing new appliances and installation. The Victorian Government's energy efficiency programs provide

information and financial support to encourage the adoption of cleaner, more efficient technologies.

Long-Term Impact on Comfort and Value

By transitioning to an all-electric home, homeowners not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also improve their property's market value. Energy-efficient electric appliances are increasingly sought after by buyers who value lower running costs and reduced carbon footprints.

The enhanced comfort from efficient heating and cooling systems also improves daily living standards. With electricity prices becoming more competitive and renewable energy becoming more accessible, the shift to all-electric homes represents a smart investment in the future.

Participating in Local Energy Upgrade Programs

The Yarra Home Energy Upgrades pilot program ran from January - June 2025 and provided eligible residents with subsidies of up to $3,000 for home improvements to make the homes of concession card holders in Yarra more comfortable in hot and cold weather, install solar, or electrify. The pilot program ran concurrently with the Climate Safe Rooms pilot program.

Expressions of interest for the 2025/26 Yarra Home Energy Upgrades program are not yet open.

You can learn more about the completed pilot program below. This page will be updated with information about the 2025/26 program when expressions of interest open, in late 2025.

What did the pilot program subsidy cover?

Funding could be used to install:

- solar
- reverse cycle heating and cooling
- insulation for your ceiling, walls or under your floor
- draught proofing to seal gaps and cracks
- heat pump hot water systems

Eligible households could use the subsidy to choose more than one energy upgrade, up to a maximum of $3,000.

Participants received a home energy assessment to recommend the best upgrades for their homes.

Did participants have to pay anything for the upgrades?

In some cases, 100% of the cost could be covered by the subsidy and other available rebates. Our project partner and the program suppliers helped participants apply for Victorian Government rebates. Find out more about rebates below.

Our program suppliers provided no-obligation quotes for upgrades recommended by the home energy assessment. Participants could choose to contribute to the cost if it was more than the rebate amount.

The Victorian Government also offers no-interest loans of up to $1,400 for solar. Find out more about no-interest loans.

Concession card and healthcare card holders living in the City of Yarra.

This included renters, homeowners and community housing residents. Rental providers (landlords) could also apply on behalf of an eligible tenant. Public housing owned by the Victorian Government was not eligible.

Participants or someone living in their home must hold one of the following eligible Commonwealth concession cards:

- Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card
- Veterans' Affairs Pensioner Concession Card
- Centrelink Health Care Card
- Veterans' Affairs Gold Card for All Conditions
- Veterans' Affairs Gold Card War Widow/er or TPI

- Veterans' Affairs Gold Card POW & EDA

How did it work?

Participants completed an expression of interest.

Expressions of interest are not yet open for the 2025/26 program.

A Home Energy Assessor visited participants' homes for an energy assessment to recommend the best upgrades. The home energy assessment included recommendations and quotes.

Participants selected upgrades and obtained required permissions from landlords.

Our project partners arranged for licensed tradespeople to install upgrades.

Were renters and apartment residents eligible?

Renters, community housing residents and people living in apartments were eligible to apply, with an eligible concession card.

Victorian Government-owned public housing was not eligible for this program.

Renters and community housing residents needed approval from their landlord or community housing organisation for upgrades to be installed.

For apartment buildings and townhouses, only energy upgrades that do not require owners' corporation approval or where owners' corporation approval could be granted in the timeframe could be installed. Some products cannot be installed in some building types.

What about homes in a heritage overlay?

Yarra residents living in a heritage overlay were eligible to apply, with an eligible concession card.

If a home is in the heritage overlay, most Yarra Home Energy Upgrades can be installed in the same way as in another home.

Some upgrades, such as solar, may require a planning permit if visible from the street or a public park.

There is no fee for a planning permit for solar in the heritage overlay. If your solar will not be visible from the street or a public park, you do not need a planning permit.

A small number of properties have additional heritage controls.

Find out more about solar in a heritage overlay.

What other rebates are available?

Solar rebates

The Victorian Government offers rebates of up to $1,400 through Solar Victoria to eligible households, including for rental properties. No-interest loans of up to $1,400 are also available.

You'll automatically receive STCs (small scale technology certificates, a Federal Government rebate) as a discount shown on your quote.

Heat pump hot water system rebates

Eligible households can receive a Solar Victoria of up to $1,000. All households receive a discount of between $490 and $840 from the Victorian Energy Upgrades program using accredited installers through the Yarra Home Energy Upgrades program.

Reverse cycle heating and cooling rebates

The Victorian Energy Upgrades program provides a discount of between $70 and $280 to install a reverse cycle air conditioner using accredited installers through the Yarra Home Energy Upgrades program, if you're not replacing another heater.

If you're replacing a gas heater, you'll receive a larger discount of between $560 and $1,400.

If you're replacing an old reverse cycle air conditioner, you'll receive a discount of between $210 and $490.

Draught proofing rebates

Victorian Energy Upgrades rebates are available for draught proofing to seal up gaps and cracks, using our accredited installers. You'll see this as a discount on your quote.

Rebate amounts depend on what is installed. Indicative rebates are between $350 and $700 for a house, between $280 and $560 for a townhouse, and $70 and $140 for an apartment.

Additional subsidies for people with certain health conditions

The Yarra Climate Safe Rooms pilot program ran concurrently with the Yarra Home Energy Upgrades pilot program. The Climate Safe Rooms pilot program provided eligible residents who receive support services for a health condition that puts them at risk from extreme heat or cold with free energy upgrades worth up to $10,000 to upgrade a room in their home so it stays a comfortable temperature on hot and cold days.

Eligible residents could participate in either the Yarra Home Energy Upgrades program or the Climate Safe Rooms program.

Preparing Homes for Sale or Rental

New minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties come into effect in phases from 1 March 2027.

They cover heating, cooling, hot water and shower heads, ceiling insulation and draughtproofing. They follow consultation on draft regulations in 2024 and are part of wider electrification regulations for Victoria.

The new standards may help drive down power bills for renters, keeping their homes more comfortable year-round, and cut emissions.

Timing of new energy efficiency standards

Date effective	Change	Description of change
From 1 March 2027	Energy-efficient heating and hot water systems	When existing heating and hot water systems permanently fail, rental providers must replace them with energy efficient ones.
	Energy- efficient ceiling insulation and shower heads	At the start of a new rental agreement – or conversion to a month-by-month agreement – rental providers must install: 4-star showerhead/s ceiling insulation in spaces where none exists.
From 1 March 2027	Energy – efficient cooling	At the start of a new rental agreement – or conversion to a month-by-month agreement – rental providers must install:

		Energy – efficient cooling in the main living area The new cooling standard will require that a 3-star fixed energy efficient cooling appliance or 2-star equivalent central cooler be installed in the main living area of a rental property. If there is an existing fixed non-energy efficient cooling appliance, it must be upgraded to an energy efficient system at the end of life of the existing appliance. From 1 July 2030, all rental properties must have energy-efficient cooling in the main living area. This will apply regardless of the date a rental agreement was entered into or commenced unless a specific exemption applies.
From 1 July 2027	Draughtproofing	At the start of a new rental agreement, or conversion to a month-by-month agreement, rental providers must draughtproof all external doors, windows and unsealed wall vents.

Rebates

Rental providers will be able to access rebates to make all required upgrades through the Victorian Energy Upgrades program. Note: Rebates for ceiling insulation are expected to be available by early 2026.

Exemptions

A range of exemptions apply for situations where compliance with the standards is not possible or would incur unreasonable costs. For example, rental apartments where heating, cooling or hot water is supplied through centralised systems.

Heating standard for rooming houses

From 1 December 2024, if a rooming house operator installs a heater in a resident's room, it must be a 'fixed heater' secured to a wall, floor or ceiling of the room.

From 1 December 2025, rooming house operators must install a fixed heater secured to a wall, floor or ceiling of each resident's room.

A 'fixed heater' is either:

- an electric ducted heating or electric hydronic heating system; or
- an electric non-portable heater; or

- a non-ducted air conditioner or heat pump with a 2 star or above heating rating.

From 1 December 2030, rooming house operators must provide an energy efficient fixed heater secured to a wall, floor or ceiling in each resident's room.

An 'energy efficient fixed heater' is either:

- an electric non-portable, non-ducted air conditioner or heat pump with a 2 star or above heating rating, or
- an electric ducted air conditioner or heat pump with a Heating Seasonal Performance Factor of 3.2 or above.

Existing gas ducted or gas hydronic heating systems in good working order do not need to be removed until they reach the end of their life.

Rooming house operators may be exempt from part or all of the standard if they have existing fixed heating, or if installation would not be permitted due to heritage laws or owners corporation rules.

Blind and curtain cords standard for residential rental properties

Unsecured blind or curtain cords pose a serious risk to children, who can get tangled in loose cords.

From 1 December 2025, all corded internal window coverings in residential rental properties must have an anchor installed to ensure the cords are secured or tensioned and can't form a loose loop.

To help make blind cords and curtains safer in your home, we provide free curtain and blind cord safety kits. You can order a free kit from us or buy one at a hardware store.

Conclusion

Improving the comfort and value of your home can be simple, affordable, and highly rewarding. By focusing on small but effective upgrades like better insulation, sealing gaps, using energy-efficient systems, and maintaining clean and functional surfaces, you can create a more enjoyable living space while also increasing property appeal. Taking advantage of local energy upgrade programs and following government-recommended standards makes these improvements even more accessible. Whether you are planning to stay long term or preparing to rent or sell, investing in practical home upgrades helps you save energy, reduce costs, and build a healthier, more valuable home for the future.

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Participating in Local Energy Upgrade Programs
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Preparing Homes for Sale or Rental
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