

One common type of access to the attic that can cause higher monthly bills is the pull-down attic stairs.

If pull-down stairs are not sealed properly, extremely hot or cold air from the attic can infiltrate into the home. In a typical 1,000-square-foot home, a poorly sealed pull-down attic stairway could reduce the effectiveness of the attic insulation by as much as 30 percent.

The good news is that this problem can be eliminated with little effort.

The frame for the pull-down stairs fits into a rough opening and rests upon a flat panel that is on the living-space side.

If there is a gap on the end where the hinges are located, the gap must be sealed. If the gap is less than one-half inch, you can apply caulk to seal. If a larger opening exists, non-expanding foam or a backing material (backer rod) is recommended in conjunction with caulk.

Be careful if using expanding foam to seal this gap. Because the material can easily expand (often more than people think), make sure it does not interfere with the ability of the stairs to open or close.

To ensure a tight fit, add weather-stripping where the flat panel fits against the ceiling. Adding a latch bolt on the living space side ensures a tighter seal.

Finally, it's extremely important to add a light-weight attic stair cover box made from rigid insulation above the top of the stairs. The box rests above the stairs on the attic side. The box is simply pushed aside to gain attic access. For details on constructing this box, see the illustration on back.

