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Wasted Energy is Obvious to a Trained Eye

Almost every problem homeowners have with their homes relates to a flaw in construction. That may sound obvious but since there are inspections during the building process this should not even happen, right? Wrong. Some building codes are dead wrong and still being used today. A ventilated crawl space is almost guaranteed to be a problem in our area. Mold, moisture, odor, energy loss, frozen pipes, and cold floors are some of the most common problems with a ventilated crawl space. Almost every crawl space I have seen was able to be repaired and encapsulated to correct every one of those problems.

Similar problems are present in nearly every attic. The building code is not designed to reduce energy usage but to make sure buildings don't collapse. The energy code is applied to reduce energy consumption but it doesn't even come close to addressing all of the flaws that are present in the construction process. An energy expert can spot problems with an attic inspection and many can be resolved without a lot of expense. Allowing clean, conditioned air from the living space to rise up into the attic and go out the ridge vent is an energy crime. Probably 25% of the cost to heat a home is lost through the roof. That can be reduced to approximately 5% by airsealing and insulating.

A Department of Energy study estimates that residential duct systems leak between 25 and 40% of the air they are supposed to deliver to individual rooms. A duct system is made up of several parts. A main supply duct and a main return duct are the basis for it and smaller branch ducts are connected to them. We typically find leakage at several places during our inspections. Where the main ducts connect to the HVAC equipment, where the branch ducts are connected to the main ducts and where sections of main duct connect to each other. The leakage throws the whole system out of kilter. If the duct system is in an unconditioned space like a crawl space or attic, this is a huge waste of energy.

I see these repairs as an opportunity for a whole new curriculum at the trade schools. If agile, energetic, skilled young people were sent into homes to seek and seal air leakage from the building and the duct systems and then insulation was added, we could reduce fossil fuel usage by a huge amount. I believe the government should incentivize this before it incentivizes solar and heat pump installation because it applies to EVERY home in the country.

Ken Field is the owner of Slate Belt Energy and Field's Service, Inc. As a certified energy rater and contractor, he is qualified to assess every aspect of energy usage and prescribe solutions to save energy. He can be reached at 610-759-6306 or email Ken@FieldsService.com

Warren County Police Start 'Blue Envelope' Program

By Art Charlton

(WHITE TOWNSHIP, NJ – March 3, 2023) – Law enforcement agencies in Warren County launched a new program to improve interactions between a driver with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and a police officer during a traffic stop, officials announced today.

Called the "Blue Envelope Program," the initiative funded by Warren County government provides a blue envelope to individuals with ASD that contains written information and guidance to help facilitate effective communication with police officers, making traffic stops safer and less stressful for all parties involved.

"Overall, the Blue Envelope Program represents a crucial step toward promoting greater inclusivity and understanding in our communities while also providing our police with the tools they need to keep everyone safe," Warren County Commissioner James R. Kern III, commission liaison for public safety, said during the program announcement held at the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building. "We are proud to support this important initiative in Warren County," Kern added.

Representatives of nearly every municipal police department in the county, as well as the county Sheriff's Office and Prosecutor's Office, were on hand for the announcement. Also participating were state Sen. Douglas J. Steinhardt and Assembly Minority Leader John DiMaio, who have teamed up to sponsor legislation to implement the Blue Envelope Program statewide.

Pohatcong Police Chief Scott Robb, who is president of the Warren County Police Chiefs Association, said the Blue Envelope Program originated in Connecticut in 2020. Outside of that state, Warren is only the second county, after neighboring Hunterdon, to establish the program, he said.

All officers in Warren County will be trained in the program, Robb explained. The blue envelopes can be obtained at all local police departments in the county, as well as the Sheriff's Office, he added.

Steinhardt noted the envelope with its instructions and information for both police and drivers will help to avoid any unnecessary confusion or escalation during a traffic stop, helping the officer and the person with ASD to communicate more effectively.

"All too often there are misunderstandings that can escalate situations," DiMaio said, adding the program will result in "a better outcome for everyone."

Participating drivers should keep important documents – vehicle registration, insurance card, driver's license and emergency contract information – inside the envelope to avoid the tension of searching for those documents during a stop. Printed on the outside of the blue envelope, in large letters, are the words "DRIVER IS ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM" followed by a line to indicate whether the driver is verbal or nonverbal.

One side of the envelope has information for drivers, letting them know to keep their hands on the steering wheel unless otherwise directed, and notes that an officer may shine a flashlight in the car, may have a radio, and may have flashing lights on their car. A "Police Officer Spectrum Awareness Guide" is found on the other side of the envelope, informing officers that the driver "may exhibit signs of anxiety due to bright lights and noises like your radio" and that "Driver may display repetitive body movements or fidgeting and may have unusual eye contact."

Officers are alerted to speak clearly, use the most simplistic explanations possible, allow drivers extra time to respond, and to clearly tell the driver when the stop is over and they can leave. The envelope also notes that if the driver becomes upset, the officer should consider contacting the person listed on the contact card.

Warren County First Assistant Prosecutor Anthony Robinson noted that "a great deal of law enforcement depends on perception" and the Blue Envelope Program establishes from the outset what police and the public can expect in a traffic stop involving someone on the autism spectrum.



Pohatcong Police Chief Scott Robb, who is president of the Warren County Police Chiefs Association, holds up the blue envelope that drivers with Autism Spectrum Disorder can give to police officers during a traffic stop.

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