

KeyExpert



Energy-efficient windows, doors — cost vs. benefit

BOB SMITH

Contributing Columnist
opinion@lbknews.com

There are lots of options when choosing new windows and doors. From new insulated low-E coatings on glass to all vinyl frames to “self-cleaning glass” — the decision process can be mind-boggling.

As the features go up, so will your investment and the benefits. Here is a basic breakdown of product pricing and the real pros and cons:

- **Most cost effective/least energy-efficient:** aluminum frames with non-insulated glass. Aluminum-framed windows have been installed in Florida for decades. Aluminum frames are strong, resistant to the harsh Florida climate and cost effective, but they are the

least energy efficient as they conduct heat from outside to inside. After all, frying pans are made from aluminum.

- **Cost effective/more energy efficient:** aluminum frames with insulated glass with a low-E coating. It’s a fact that more than 80 percent of a window’s surface is glass. So it only makes sense that if you make the glass energy efficient you will improve the performance of the window. Adding this benefit will typically add about 30 percent to the cost of the window and typically be 30 percent more energy efficient. There are a lot of variables, of course, but this



SMITH

is a good rule of thumb.

- **Highest investment/best energy efficiency:** vinyl or vinyl clad over wood frames with insulated low-E glass. Vinyl frames are significantly more energy efficient than aluminum, and most homeowners agree the window profiles are far more attractive. This package can double the price of the entry-level products.

The final decision is rarely based solely on energy efficiency or the cost. We recommend that homeowners visit a showroom with full-size displays and knowledgeable sales consultants. Do some research on the window contractor to ensure they have a strong local reputation for high integrity.