

# Foam franchise keeps homes warm and dry

## Owner touts product that acts as insulator, vapour barrier

BY KATHY MURRIE, FREELANCE MAY 19, 2009 7:25 AM



Michael Wiskin of EnviroFoam Insulation insulates a new home in Sherwood Park. Sprayed between the wood studs, the insulation hardens within seconds.

**Photograph by:** Brian Gavriloff, The Journal, Freelance

Designer/builder Paul Rains has seen plenty of construction projects in his 15 years in the business, and says he has yet to see vapour barrier done right. An integral part of the building insulation process, vapour barrier -- sheets of clear plastic meant to stop air and moisture from leaking through walls -- is often assigned to the least-skilled worker.

So it was a no-brainer that Rains would look for something better when he decided to build his own unique home near Sherwood Park. That's when he found EnviroFoam.

The environmentally friendly sprayed-in foam insulation -- based on soy oil and recycled plastics -- replaces both conventional pink insulation batts and vapour barrier, stopping the movement of heat, air and moisture. No cold, drafty structures with this product.

And for Rains, there's a huge bonus. Where it would have taken five weeks to have the insulation and vapour barrier done in his 8,500-sq.-ft. home, "with these guys, they're done in five days." That means he's closer to getting drywall up and closer to completing his family's dream home by the fall. That kind of saving can have a major impact on any construction project, he adds.

With the foam, it was much easier to work around the complex trusses of his home's butterfly roof -- low in the middle and high on the edges, leaving no gaps for drafts or heat loss, and creating a warm

attic. And the foam adds an element of rigidity to the entire structure, says Rains.

One more factor in its favour is the R-value, the heat-loss rating used to gauge insulation. Rains says that at lows like -30 C that we've seen in winters here, conventional insulation loses most of its heat-trapping properties. "Not with this," he says, pointing to the foam in his walls. "It's a constant."

The house is just one of hundreds of projects done by local EnviroFoam franchise owner and installer Chawki Aicha. With years of construction experience, the former general manager jumped on an opportunity a year ago to buy out his former employer. Now Aicha has four full-time workers doing projects in Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park and Fort McMurray.

There's lots of co-operation among the regional franchisees, who often work together. "We're like family," he explains. His crew has done about 40 homes, 70 basements and numerous smaller projects like bay windows and "bonus rooms" over garages, lots of attics and retrofits. An average 1,200-sq.-ft. bungalow can be totally sealed in a day and a half, he adds.

The beauty of foam is it can be applied inside during construction or from the outside, such as under new siding during renovations.

Aicha has worked on large commercial projects as well, such as Bikram Yoga studios in downtown Edmonton and off Whyte Avenue, Michael Cormier's concrete concept house in the Highlands area, the Brightwood Ranch Christian camp near Entwistle and Stony Plain's Memorial composite school. They insulated the whole envelope -- the entire perimeter of that school -- in just five days, Aicha says.

A cohort in Grande Prairie, Brad Redl, recently finished a project for a Hutterite colony at nearby Wanham, a 17,000-sq.-ft. building that includes a truck wash and fabrication shop. That took just 13 days, says Redl.

Another plus for EnviroFoam is its acoustic properties -- it blocks noise. Redl capitalized on that when he did the ceiling below a flat roof on a 5,000-sq.-ft. audio-video shop in Grande Prairie.

So what is this magical stuff and where did it come from?

It's a two-pound closed-cell spray-applied polyurethane foam, according to EnviroFoam's literature. Steve Baines, one of three brothers who own the Lethbridge-based business, says that a few years ago he and his building and renovating siblings got tired of "seeing stuff like mould and rot" because of poor construction products.

In 2005, they discovered the newly released soy-based polyurethane foam. It's made by Demilec, a Montreal-based producer of various industrial foams used in everything from fridges to car seats.

The EnviroFoam product uses a no-ozone-depleting blowing agent. That beats a 2010 environmental target for the industry. "The others are still scrambling to meet that," says Baines. "This is the best product out there, the greenest and the best value."

Once they started using EnviroFoam, its popularity spread and inquiries about franchises started. By 2007, the brothers had left the building business and now have 26 dealers across the country "from

Victoria, B.C., to Halifax," says Baines.

EnviroFoam's website, [www.whyfoamisbetter.com](http://www.whyfoamisbetter.com), gets thousands of hits every month, and Baines says he just got a call from a builder in Scotland looking for more information.

Local installer Aicha says the product has a lifetime warranty. The closed-cell structure of the foam means it won't absorb water, while even just a quarter-inch of foam stops all air movement.

While it may be pricey to start -- about three to four times the cost of conventional insulation -- he says it will reduce energy costs by 50 to 80 per cent.

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