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JUNE 2009

Home Improvement

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HOME IMPROVEMENT

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Home Improvements

“Home is where the heart is.” A cliché, but we like to think it true. Your homebase provides your family one of life’s basic necessities—shelter; but ideally, it also reflects your personal style and makes home life, from daily chores to much needed relaxation, as comfortable as possible.

When the economy gets tight, improving your home becomes even more important, but there is a silver lining. The best thing about home improvement today, according to the experts at Improvements Catalog, is that it doesn’t have to cost a lot. There are lots of affordable options, such as roll-out cabinet shelves and solar lighting, to help you make the most of what you have. The key is to know your budget, then stick to it.

One great way to save money? Do it yourself! Since much of the cost of home improvement is attributed to labor, you can save considerably by handling the project yourself. Easy fixes include everything from painting and landscaping to changing out a light fixture. You can also create the illusion of more space by using efficient storage organizers.

For many families, the kitchen is the home’s focal point. They gather there for meals, for snacks, or just to convene. As more and more forego fancy restaurant dinners for home-cooked meals, it’s important we create efficient, attractive kitchens—conducive to crafting scrumptious dishes without

sacrificing atmosphere. We hope you’ll consider upgrading your appliances (there’s now a slew of energy-saving models on the market), or even just changing your lighting, as Designer Jonas Carnemark recommends in our article “Simple Tips for Beautifying your Bathroom & Kitchen” on page five.

Perhaps you’re satisfied with the design of your refuge, but have you considered your cooling, heating and power sources? A central air-conditioning system may keep you cool, but an energy-efficient system saves you money, adds value to your home and reduces your carbon footprint. Given the tax breaks available to those investing in eco-friendly renovations, there is truly no better time than now to make a change. See page 6 for more information. Plus check out Improvements Catalog’s great ideas for weatherizing your home indoors and out.

So maybe you can’t take that beach vacation, but you can give your deck a tropical look with new furniture cushions or a garden fountain. Ugly cement patio? Dress it up with an outdoor rug and you’ve got the perfect setting for outdoor entertaining. Improvements Catalog offers an ever-changing selection of unique, stylish and affordable solutions like these, from outdoor furniture to indoor décor. Visit them online at improvementscatalog.com.

The home is your safe haven; make sure you keep it that way. We hope you’ll take all the necessary precautions to protect your family—from the elements, as well as intruders. On page 11, we discuss home security—from technologically-advanced locks and alarm systems to sensors that alert homeowners to potentially catastrophic environmental conditions.

Whether you’re rebuilding from the ground up or just tweaking a bit, selling down the line or nesting indefinitely—there is no better time than now to improve the style, functionality and efficiency of your home. Our guide to home improvement aims to inspire you to see an ailing economy as an opportunity rather than a hindrance. From a fashion-forward faucet to a stylish shed, there are

cost-effective means of making major improvements to your living space, as well as environmentally-friendly investments that can save you money in the long-run. We hope you’ll take advantage of our ideas, and Improvements Catalog’s, too! We urge you to get out there—or rather, stay in!—and improve the ambience, functionality and efficiency of your home.

“Whether you’re rebuilding from the ground up or just tweaking... there is no better time than now to improve the style, functionality and efficiency of your home.”

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Simple Tips for Beautifying Your Bathroom & Kitchen

If you're looking to breathe some new life into your home, why not start by making some changes to the kitchen and bathroom? Simple improvements can make a prodigious impact on the aesthetics and efficiency of your living space. As an added bonus, these two areas generally provide some of the best returns on home improvement investment, according to *Remodeling* magazine.

Start by reviewing your finances and priorities. "I haven't met anyone who wasn't on a budget," says Jonas Carnemark, a Certified Remodeler (CR), Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD), and president of Carnemark Systems + Design Inc. "No matter how much they can afford to spend, they always

dream bigger than their budget. You need to figure out what makes you happy, and put the money where the smiles are. Whether it be a new mirror or new lighting, every time you see it you'll say, 'I am so glad I did that.'"

Just as an alluring piece of jewelry can alter the entire look of an outfit, home accent pieces can transform the feel of an entire room, so don't underestimate the effects of these purchases. Maximize functionality and style by trading in your blasé, outdated toaster or blender for a more attractive, modern model.

When making over a kitchen or bathroom, Carnemark suggests considering color. "Say you like the color green. You can paint a single wall lime

green and it acts like an accent, completely changing the character of the room," he explains.

He also recommends updating your lighting—both the fixtures and quality of illumination. "We often wash kitchen walls with light as opposed to just lighting the middle of the room. It gets rid of shadows and makes for a really nice living experience."

Heating, cooling and ventilation are especially important to these spaces. Exhaust fans should be installed to help control moisture. A surprising investment that can actually cut costs in the long-run—a heated floor. "It sounds like such a luxury, but think about it," urges Carnemark. "Why pay to heat the whole house if, in the

“They're easy to install and a minimum investment.”

morning, you wake up, jump in the shower and grab your coffee and go. Instead, just set the heated floor so it turns on an hour before you wake up. The floor will feel nice and warm and really chase the chill away."

Both areas present opportunities for reducing carbon footprints. Replacing a single toilet with a water-efficient, dual-flush model can save up to 6,000 gallons of water a year. Water-conserving faucets can also save homeowners money. Price Pfister's WaterSense certified products use 30 percent less water than standard models.

"Faucets come in all shapes, sizes

and price points," says Greg Williamson, vice president of marketing, Price Pfister. "They're easy to install and a minimum investment. It's now being seen as a fashion-forward category because of the impact it has on the overall appearance of a room."

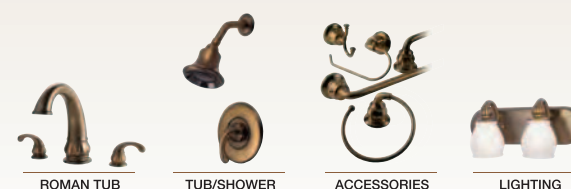
Your family spends a lot of time in both the bathroom and kitchen. Simple enhancements to these rooms can save money, boost style and improve your daily life. Map out your budget, analyze your priorities—whether they be style, functionality or energy conservation—and remember to heed Carnemark's advice: "Put the money where the smiles are."

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A California Point of View

BY: SARAH LYNCH

As the editor of *California Home + Design* magazine (www.chdmag.com), I have heard my share of home-improvement stories; sometimes they are renovation tales of woe, but many are about how simple changes to our living environment can positively affect our lives. Whether it's a floor-to-ceiling overhaul or simply a new set of windows, refreshing your home is well worth the effort—particularly in a tough real estate market. The difficult economy has made us wary of luxury purchases and major investments, but as the market begins to soften, it's time to consider a few worthwhile expenses. It may not be the moment to go shopping for a dream home or embark on an extreme makeover, but now is the perfect time to freshen up your style or make a few key upgrades.

In an effort to save money, Americans have spent increasing amounts of time at home over the past year, and have held on to their existing homes rather than sell them in this tricky market. As a result, we've had a chance to take a long look at the rooms around us, making a mental list of the things that need fixing and the annoying imperfections. Updating a kitchen or bath is one of the best investments you can make, offering considerable returns in the value of your home and infinitely improving your everyday life. But if that seems too large a commitment, consider the impact of fresh coat of paint—clean white walls or a new exterior color palette can be an easy update now and offers a great investment for resale value. Finally new flooring, whether it's installed hardwood, carpeting or a vibrant area rug, will make your exist-

ing furnishings feel renewed.

Now that federal tax credits offer incentives for eco-friendly home improvements—up to \$1,500 on upgrades in existing homes—some of the smartest investments include swapping out old appliances for new Energy Star-rated products, or installing solar rooftop panels and highly insulating windows and doors. Not only will these improvements save you money in energy bills and tax rebates, but the extra effort to implement eco-friendly elements will impact the environment. If each of us does our part, the sum of the parts is bound to affect the whole.

Each summer, we put out our annual "Renovations" issue to offer inspiration and ideas for the readers of *California Home + Design*. In the past, we've focused on dramatic transformations and what we like

to call "magical home makeovers," but this year the issue is all about simple changes. Every house requires maintenance and it's not hard to turn a necessary upgrade into a real improvement, all you need is a little inspiration and some quick solutions.



Water Powered

So you don't think anything about garden hoses can surprise you? Well, Suncast Corporation's Self-Winding Hose Reels may change your mind. Simply click a lever and a water-powered piston engine causes the hose to start winding automatically.

"We manufacturer a lot of lawn and garden products, but a new and exciting offering is our water-powered technology which allows your hose to be re-reeled automatically," explains Suncast Corporation's Director of Marketing Nancy Ottosen. "It's good for the aging baby boomer generation which wants something easy-to-use and less taxing on the muscles, and for the gimmicky, gadget-y younger generation."

Suncast Corporation employs nearly 1000 Americans, and its products are made in the USA. In this economy, that's something people of all ages can appreciate.

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Retooling the Heart of your Home: Kitchen Appliances

“The kitchen is the hub of the house,” says Jennifer Gilmer, CKD, owner of Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen and Bath, Ltd (www.jennifergilmerkitchens.com). “People aren’t just cooking there. They’re learning to create the experiences they would get when they go out. They’re making meals together with friends and sharing new recipes. It’s almost like a science lab—they’ve discovering new things and experimenting more with the food they cook.”

And just as a scientist depends on proper laboratory equipment, your home’s designated chef needs functional and energy-efficient appliances to create delicious meals and evoke a pleasant and stylish ambience.

The kitchen’s décor is especially important since it’s so often the center of social functions. “A lot of my clients are tired of being closed off. They complain that they feel disconnected when they’re cooking or cleaning, so they want a kitchen open to the family room,” shares Gilmer, who advises her clients to be sure they are happy with the room’s layout before buying new cabinets or appliances.

The National Association of Home Builders has projected Americans will spend \$217 billion on remodeling in 2009, much of that on improving kitchens. There’s no better time to upgrade your toolset than now. It’s

easy to find promotions, sales and price cuts if you are willing to do the work. Warners’ Stellan’s website (www.warnersstellian.com/page.promotion) allows users to search downloadable rebates for a variety of appliance manufacturers.

GE is offering a free stainless steel upgrade through July 6. Select appliances are available in stainless steel for the same price as traditional finishes. “Homeowners who once might have moved to a larger home are now deciding to stay and remodel, transforming their home into something more satisfying. In light of this trend, GE is focusing on making some of its popular, innovative cooking technologies more accessible to a wider range of homeowners,” explains Allison Gatta, public relations and advertising program manager for GE Consumer & Industrial, Appliances.

GE’s new offerings include an af-

fordably-priced double oven range—perfect for the times you skip the restaurant and cook dinner for family and friends at home, instead.

When shopping for new appliances, it sometimes makes sense to “bite the bullet” and splurge for a pricier model, Gilmer suggests, especially if you plan to stay in your home for a long time. “The product may be more expensive, but it will last 15 years. Just make sure it has a good warranty...it’s important to put money towards appliances, even if you have to just buy a standard cabinet.”

She recommends Liebherr refrigerators, explaining, “They have been importing for the last seven years and specialize in refrigeration.”

When you are replacing your appliances, consider space constraints and functionality. The dishwasher should be near the sink, for example. Energy-efficient choices can also save you money. ENERGY STAR, a joint project created by the U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, certifies appliances that use 10-15 percent less energy. Switching to ENERGY STAR appliances can save \$75 a year. Multiply that by all of the years you plan to stay in your home and keep environmental benefits in mind, and your next new appliance may be attractive, functional and ENERGY STAR-certified.

Tax Breaks for Cooling Costs

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, signed by President Obama on February 17, aims to stimulate the ailing economy via a variety of measures, including tax breaks. As part of this initiative, homeowners can receive tax breaks on purchases aimed at making their homes more energy-efficient.

Families spend an average of \$1,000 a year on heating and cooling their living spaces. Upgrading to an energy-efficient air conditioner will save you money—more now than ever—and curb your family’s energy expenditures. To take advantage of the tax break, your new system must meet certain requirements, including having a Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating (SEER) of at least 16.

“The SEER is basically like measuring miles per gallon for a car. If you replace an older central air system with one of these qualifying models, you’d save an estimated 35 – 40 percent a year,” explains Bob Swilik, manager of strategic development for Carrier.

Consumers who purchase a qualifying cooling system this year or next will receive a tax credit covering up to 30 percent of costs, up to \$1,500. Tax breaks also are available for projects such as upgrading to an eco-friendly furnace or installing new energy-efficient windows.

More than 84 percent of American homes are air-conditioned, and most employ central air systems which circulate air throughout the whole home and eradicate the sporadic hot spots that sometimes arise when you

“A high-performing central air system also boosts a home’s resale value.”

use window units. Carrier offers more system combinations that qualify for the tax breaks than any other manufacturer, and these eligible products often come with additional benefits, according to Swilik.

“The systems that qualify for the tax credits typically have other comfort features. They will be able to dehumidify, so they control cooling and humidity, and they circulate more air; higher SEER systems have better controls and are basically better products,” he explains.

A high-performing central air system also boosts a home’s resale value. “If you don’t have central air, it is probably going to be a problem to re-sell the house,” says Swilik. “And if you do upgrade to a better-efficiency model, that will impact the utility bills and the desirability of your home. The other factors that come along with these systems—the better humidity control, the added comfort, the more circulation of air—all add to the value of the home.”

The ENERGY STAR designation denotes air conditioners that are about 14 percent more efficient than standard units. For a list of efficient cooling systems that have earned ENERGY STAR’s seal of approval, check out the database developed by the Consortium of Energy Efficiency (CEE) and the Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute (ARI), available online at www.ceedirectory.org.

It’s important to note, though, that not all products that have earned the ENERGY STAR seal of approval qualify for the federal discount.



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Where is your Energy Going?

Cut Costs with an Energy-Efficient Water Heater

Water heating accounts for the second-largest consumption of energy after heating and air conditioning in most American households, eating up as much as 25 percent of a typical family's annual energy budget. Installing a more efficient water heater can save your family money while simultaneously reducing your energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions.

Home water heaters are powered by natural gas, propane, oil or electricity. Conventional storage heaters hold 20 to 80 gallons of hot water and are the most common type found in American residences, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Because the water is constantly heated, energy is lost through the flue and tank walls when water is not being used. Tankless water heaters waste less energy, as they provide hot water only on

demand, but they account for a small percentage of the residential market and typically can support just a single appliance at a time. One tankless heater probably won't be enough to power a shower on the second floor and a load of laundry downstairs simultaneously.

"The conventional natural gas models are usually about 75–78 percent efficient, so that means roughly 25 percent of the energy is wasted," explains David Chisolm,

brand manager, A.O. Smith. "Tankless models are 80–82 percent efficient, so they still typically waste 20 percent. The perception is that because they are not storing energy, they aren't wasting energy, but that's not the true measure of efficiency. It's how efficiently does it take heat from a flame and put that heat into the water."

A.O. Smith's line of Vertex water heaters, developed in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Energy, offer up to 96 percent thermal efficiency,

"You save money and energy on your natural gas bill, and you don't have to alter your life around your water heater, since Vertex heaters can handle multiple appliances," says Chisolm.

Conventional gas models use a vertical chimney or flue, but Vertex products have a 30-foot coil bent throughout the tank. The increased surface area improves efficiency. Other options include solar-powered heaters, heat pump heaters and integrated systems which can be linked to a furnace or boiler and also only heat water upon demand.

Most water heater purchases are replacement buys, and consumers far too often fail to realize that they have options. "If the water heater fails, the typical response is 'I had a 40-gallon gas water heater, I need a new 40-gallon gas

water heater.' Consumers forget there are better-performing, more energy-efficient choices," explains Chisolm.

Homeowners should consider space constraints—tankless models are typically smaller—and their family's water usage when shopping for a new water heater. Then they can concentrate on finding the most efficient product so they can cut costs and reduce wasted energy. Regardless of which type they choose, individuals can reduce their carbon footprint by simply lowering the temperature of their heater.

There are approximately 100 million water heaters in the U.S.—that's 100 million chances to reduce our nation's electricity consumption and carbon dioxide emissions while saving consumers money.

Standby Generators:

An Emerging Power Solution for Home Owners

The average American consumer experiences more than five power outages annually, but all too often homeowners wait until they suffer through a truly debilitating power outage before investing in adequate protection. The new generation of automatic standby generators on the market today may prove to be an affordable and effective means of insuring one's home before the lights go out.

While portable generators run on gasoline, provide 8–12 hours of electricity to select home appliances via an extension cord, and, in general, require more maintenance, automatic standby generators are directly wired to the home's electrical panel, are permanently installed outside the home and feature a continuous fuel connection to natural gas or liquid propane for uninterrupted backup power. When the electricity goes out, standby generators turn on automatically and supply clean, reliable power until the

regular utility power is restored.

Michael Betker, marketing manager for Briggs & Stratton Corporation, the exclusive licensee for GE-branded Standby Generator Systems, likens the differences between portable and standby generators to the differences between window-unit air conditioners and central air systems. "The standby system will power your entire house, not just a single area, just as central air will keep your whole home cool—not just one room," he explains.

The standby generator category

appears to be maturing much like the central air category has done—through healthy competition and innovation that has served to improve quality and drive down prices. "As the central air conditioning category matured, more and more people were able to afford the luxury of a central air conditioning system. Following the same model, the 10,000-watt home standby system by GE is finally making standby power more affordable for people, offering inexpensive whole-house standby power that fits the needs of about 73 percent of U.S.

households," comments Betker.

This new line of residential generators, launched earlier this year, is a timely answer to last year's seeming surge in wild weather and erratic fuel prices. Those who live in regions more prone to weather disasters, from hurricanes to ice storms, may be especially apt to consider a standby generator, as the risk of suffering from a blackout is higher, and portable units are not supposed to be run in inclement weather. "That's another nice thing about standbys. They are professionally installed and fully-enclosed, so they will turn on anytime—rain or shine," Betker adds.

Consumers can choose to back up select circuits or cover their entire home with whole-house solutions. Betker recommends visiting www.ge.com/generatorsystems for more information about the category. "Our partner, GE, has quite a pedigree in

terms of power management, and they selected Briggs & Stratton because of our expertise on the engine side. Together, our extensive research enabled us to understand what consumers are looking for, and the Web site reflects that. We want to demystify this fairly unknown category. We want to help people select the model that fits their needs and educate them on the facts."

Betker also notes the increase in "stay-cations" in light of the current economy, commenting, "People want to make their home a fortress, a cocoon against the elements. A Standby Generator is an affordable insurance policy. Your home is operational, regardless of what happens outside."





The Coolest New Thing In Home Improvement.

"It was hot outside. Really hot. And after waiting 5 hours in line for gas for my portable generator, I secretly began longing for the central air-conditioning, home-cooked meals, and warm showers I had taken for granted before the power went out."

The best home improvement you can make is one that keeps you in your home and comfortable when the power goes out. Finally there is an affordable whole house backup power solution that will automatically manage the energy demands of your entire home, including the high power demands of central air-conditioning.

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Curing the Garden Hose Woes: The Teknor Apex Neverkink Hose

It's time to water the garden. You connect your hose to the spigot and begin the trek around your home to the backyard where the flowers reside, but when you finally pull the trigger, no water spurts forth. Sound familiar?

Consumers cite kinking and twisting as their number one complaint about garden hoses, according to market research conducted by Teknor Apex, the nation's leading manufacturer of garden hoses.

The Apex Neverkink hose addresses this problem with its patented NTS Reflex Mesh technology. "The proprietary technology causes loops and tangles to self-straighten," explains Mike Melo, product manager at Teknor Apex. "Throughout our research, people commented on the

annoyance of kinking, twisting and tangling found in standard garden hoses. Our product is easy to use, coil and maneuver, and guaranteed not to kink or tangle. It meets a need in the marketplace."

There are a variety of Neverkink models, each with its own features and benefits. Most are fortified with MicroShield antimicrobial protection, which guards against mold and mildew, reducing deterioration. Heavier-duty versions are outfitted with material that increases weather flexibility so they don't become too brittle

in cool temperatures. All models are life-time guaranteed and can be purchased in most home improvement stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot.

Neverkink's Reflex Mesh technology delivers what consumers seek—freedom from kinking and tangling. So the next time you venture to the garden, you won't have to circle back.



Shedding Stereotypes:

Gone are the Days of the Unstylish Shed

For decades, homeowners have taken pride in their neatly kempt lawns—a symbol of the American dream. Gone are the days of the purely functional, sometimes decrepit, garden or storage shed. The modern shed flatters or matches the landscape.

Sheds conveniently provide additional storage space sans whole-home renovation, but they don't have to look utilitarian. There's an array of wood options on the market, which

are often more stylish than metal structures. If you can't find a design that's to your liking, you can create your own. Summerwood Products' online design center allows D.I.Y.-ers to modify preexisting designs or draft brand new ones.

Of course your shed is stylish, but be sure to keep functionality in mind. Erect it in close proximity to where it will be used, and be sure to look into your local building codes to see if you need a permit.

“Sheds conveniently provide additional storage space sans whole-home renovation”

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Burglaries are on the Rise

Make Sure your Home is Protected

According to recent statistics released by the FBI, most major crime declined last year, with one exception—burglaries.

Break-in rates typically peak in the summer, as more people are away from their homes. If you're going on vacation, make sure someone brings in your mail and newspapers, and turn down the phone ringer so it can't be heard from outside.

Whether you'll be gone for an hour or a week, always lock all doors. Jason Williams, senior product manager for Kwikset, says people are especially likely to neglect the door between

the garage and the home. "It's important to have that extra layer of safety," he explains. "Also make sure you have deadbolts on every entry door, and never hide keys under mats or label them with personal information."

To avoid the hassle of losing keys altogether, you could opt for an electronic touchpad system. Kwikset's SmartCode keyless entry deadbolt system locks automatically, so you don't need to worry about keys or locking the door.

Alarm systems can also prevent break-ins. A recent study by Temple University found that homes with monitored security systems are three times less likely to be burglarized. "You also get a 20 percent discount on your homeowner's insurance if you have one, and they also detect fire, floods and carbon monoxide," explains Bob Tucker, an ADT spokesperson. He suggests planting thorny bushes under the windows to deter burglars and installing motion detectors lights for additional protection.

A home is burglarized every 15 seconds in the U.S.—take precautions to ensure it's not yours.

Homes with monitored security systems are three times less likely to be burglarized.



Environmental Security Sensors:

The Missing Link in Complete Home Protection

Americans file more property insurance claims due to water leakage, temperature extremes and humidity changes than burglary and fire damage combined.

"People tend not to invest in safety measures until they come home and are ankle-deep in water. It really is necessary to prevent against water and temperature damage. They have a burglar living with them 24/7—they

just don't know it," says Winland Electronics' International Sales Manager Paul Machacek.

Winland Electronics' line of environmental security sensors alert home owners to hazardous conditions such as water leakage, power outages

and dangerous humidity levels on their properties. The devices can be connected to existing hard-wired or wireless security systems—providing the missing link in complete home protection.

"A common application is for vacation homes or second properties, since people aren't there all the time," explains Machacek. "It provides peace of mind that the property is being monitored. For example, coastal condominium owners depend on the

AC to prevent the condo from turning into a mold museum. In the event the AC goes out due to loss of power, they would be alerted. In colder regions, people need to monitor the temperatures of their vacation homes. If the furnace went out, they would be informed before the pipes froze and potentially cracked."

Water leaks can be caused by anything from washing machines to icemakers to kitchen sinks—common applications in most living spaces.

Winland Electronics' WaterBug devices are specifically designed to detect adverse water levels.

If consumers don't have an existing security measure in place, environmental sensors can be installed through auto-dial systems that call programmed phone numbers with a recorded message in the case of an emergency. Contact your local security provider or visit www.winland.com for more information.

Protect Your Home

Safeguard valuable property against **water leakage, extreme humidity, improper temperatures, critical gases such as CO₂** and other environmental conditions.

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