

Guide to Grading Installations of Home Insulation



Why is having properly installed insulation important?

Gaps, voids and compressions in insulation allow hot or cold air into the wall cavities, ceilings and floors. These drafts result in decreased insulating value, increased heating and cooling expenses, and encourage the formation of condensation which leads to mold growth over time.

How can you tell if the insulation is up to code?

When insulation installation is assessed, assemblies are often classified as Grade I, Grade II or Grade III. These grades are determined by evaluating two criteria: missing insulation and compression. Grade I is the only grade considered to be code compliant for the prescriptive path, as it is generally installed according to manufacturers' instructions (2012 IECC Section R-303.2).

First Criteria: Missing Insulation

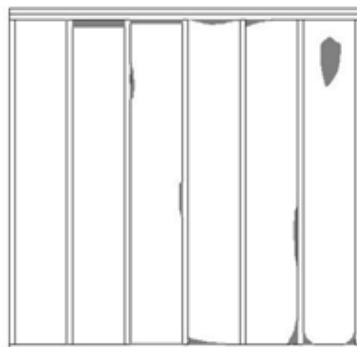
The first criteria when determining an insulation installation's grade is measuring any missing insulation.

(Diagrams based on Home Energy Rating System Standards)



Grade I*

0% to 0.5% of the area (or up to 7 sq. in./stud bay) of missing insulation is observed.



Grade II*

0.5% to 2% of the area (or 7 sq. in. to 27 sq. in./stud bay) of missing insulation is observed.



Grade III*

More than 2% of the area (or more than 27 sq. in./stud bay) of missing insulation is observed.

Second Criteria: Compression

The second criteria when determining insulation grade is measuring the level of compression.**

Grade I*: Up to 2% of the area can be compressed, and that compression must be no less than 70% of intended depth.

Grade II*: Up to 10% of the area can be compressed, and that compression must be no less than 70% of intended depth.

Grade III*: A total compression area of more than 10% (or more than 133 sq. in./stud bay).

*Suggested ranges based on RESNET guidelines. Area calculations are based on 8 ft. ceiling with 16" o.c. stud bays.

** The Insulation institute allows inset stapling but it is not recommended here since it reduces the R-value of the wall.

Insulation Code Compliance Challenges

It's often immediately clear whether insulation installation is Grade I or Grade III. However, distinguishing between Grade I and Grade II can be far more difficult. Since Grade II is not code compliant, a close evaluation is extremely important. Taking a closer look and asking, "Is the batt split around wiring or piping?", "Is it cut tightly around switches and receptacles?", "Do the compressed areas reduce thickness to under 70% of the intended depth?", "Is the total area of missing insulation less than 7 sq. in./stud bay?" will help you reach a final determination. In short, carefully assessing the total sum of imperfections will more clearly lead to an appropriate Grade I or Grade II classification.

For reference, please review these examples of actual Grade I, II and III insulation assemblies.

Grade I: Compliant



No noticeable gaps or compression



Insulation is cut and split around electrical wiring



Insulation in full contact with all six sides of stud cavity

Grade II: NOT Compliant



Excessive compression



Insulation is not cut around electrical box

Grade III: NOT Compliant



Significant gaps and insulation does not fill entire cavity



Insulation is not cut and split around plumbing

Note: Installing water lines in exterior walls is not recommended.

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- Virtual, In Office or Job Site Visits
- One-on-One Consultations
- Small Group Trainings
- Topic Specific Trainings
- Blower Door Demonstrations
- REScheck Consultations

Other Helpful Resources

U.S. Department of Energy Insulation Guide
www.energy.gov/energysaver/weatherize/insulation



North American Insulation Manufacturers Association Tips
<https://insulationinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Insulation-Institute-Tech-Tips.pdf>

