OTTAWA INSULATION CONTRACTORS

Attics & Venting

Attic insulation in Ottawa: loose-fill, baffles, the 1/300 vent rule, hatches, cathedral ceilings and what new houses get

5 Expert Answers from R-Value IQ

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Q1

Can blown-in insulation cover the soffit vents in my Kanata attic?

Blown-in insulation must not block soffit vents. Ontario's Building Code (section 9.25.2.4) states that where soffit vents are used, loose-fill insulation must be kept from blocking them, and section 9.19 requires that ceiling insulation not restrict the free flow of air through the attic.

The Code also sets out what the air space near the eaves must look like. Where preformed baffles are used at the eaves, they must keep an unobstructed air space of at least 25 mm between the insulation and the roof sheathing, and the baffles must extend at least 50 mm above the top of the insulation. Separately, the Code requires that at least 25 per cent of the total vent area be at the bottom of the roof and at least 25 per cent at the top, with vents spread on opposite sides of the attic. Blocking the soffits would eliminate the low intake vents and break that balance.

A few things are worth confirming with the contractor before work starts:

- Whether baffles are already in place at every rafter bay, and whether any need to be added, replaced or extended to reach above the new insulation depth.
- The finished depth of the blown-in layer across the whole attic floor, including near the eaves where depth is naturally shallower.
- The target R-value and the material being used, since Natural Resources Canada lists design values of R-2.9 per inch for blown glass fibre and R-3.6 per inch for blown cellulose (settled thickness), so the depth needed to hit a given R-value differs by material.
- Whether the contractor will verify that all soffit vents are clear and unobstructed after the work is done.

If your attic has older insulation already in place, ask the contractor whether it contains vermiculite before any work disturbs it. Health Canada advises that vermiculite insulation produced before 1990 may contain asbestos and should not be disturbed; testing and any removal belong to a specialist, and ottawaabatement.com covers that side of the work.

Before you agree to a price, ask the contractor exactly how they plan to protect each soffit vent opening and what they will do if a baffle is missing or damaged in a particular bay.

Q2

Should the attic hatch be weatherstripped in an Ottawa house?

Yes, the attic hatch should be weatherstripped. Ontario's Building Code (section 9.25.3) requires that access hatches in an air-barrier assembly be weatherstripped.

The hatch sits in the ceiling plane that separates heated living space from the unheated attic, so it is part of that air-barrier assembly. Weatherstripping seals the gap around the hatch frame where the cover rests. Without it, that gap is an opening in an otherwise continuous barrier to air leakage, which the Code requires to be continuous throughout the assembly.

We found no Code number for the hatch cover itself, but the cover is part of the insulated ceiling assembly, and section 9.25.1.1.(2) requires thermal insulation wherever heated space is separated from unheated space or outside air. Ask the contractor what R-value they plan for the cover and how it will be held in place so it does not shift and leave a gap.

A few things worth confirming with whoever does the work:

- that the weatherstripping material seats firmly against the hatch frame on all four sides when the cover is closed
- that the hatch cover is rigid enough not to bow and break the seal
- that any insulation placed on top of the cover does not prevent the cover from closing flush
- whether the attic contains any old insulation that should be checked before anyone goes up there, since disturbing certain older materials requires a professional assessment first

The Code also says when an attic needs a hatch: where the attic or roof space measures at least 10 m² in area, 1 000 mm in length or width and 600 mm in height over that area, or where it contains a fuel-fired appliance (9.19.2.1). Ask the City about the hatch size rules for your house. If the existing hatch is smaller, that is a question to raise with the City's Building Code Services before any work is done.
If you want quotes from Ottawa insulation contractors on weatherstripping, hatch insulation or a full attic air-sealing job, the request form on this site sends your details to contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q3

Is a cathedral ceiling insulated differently from an attic in Ottawa?

Yes. A cathedral ceiling has no open attic space: the insulation sits inside the roof assembly itself, between the ceiling finish below and the roof sheathing above, and the Code's venting rules apply inside that assembly.

Ontario's Building Code (Section 9.19) says that where insulation sits between a ceiling and the roof sheathing, there must be a continuous air space between the top of the insulation and the sheathing, plus vents placed so that at least 25 per cent of the vent area is at the top and at least 25 per cent at the bottom, spread on opposite sides. Where venting is provided to a roof-joist space, at least 63 mm of space is kept above the insulation, and where preformed baffles are used, they keep an air space of at least 25 mm and extend at least 50 mm above the top of the insulation. The insulation must not restrict the free flow of air through that space.

If a contractor proposes an unvented, spray-foamed roof instead, Natural Resources Canada advises: do not proceed without approval from your building inspector, and then only use a certified spray foam contractor who is familiar with the process. The Code (9.25.2.5.(1)) also says spray-applied polyurethane insulation shall be installed in accordance with CAN/ULC-S705.2, so ask any spray foam contractor for proof that their work meets that standard.

For a new house or addition, the Code's energy standard for housing, SB-12, sets the minimum for a ceiling without an attic space at R-31 (Zone 1, which covers all of Ottawa). That is the new-construction target; we found no Code number that applies to voluntarily upgrading an existing cathedral ceiling.

A quote for cathedral ceiling work should spell out the material, the finished thickness, the R-value achieved, how the required air space will be kept or, for an unvented design, the approval from your building inspector, and what air and vapour barrier work is included. If spray foam is proposed, ask for the contractor's written instructions on when to leave the area and how long to keep it ventilated.

If you want to hear from Ottawa insulation contractors who work on cathedral ceilings, the request form on this page sends your details to contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q4

Can new insulation go on top of the old in my Nepean attic?

New insulation can be added on top of what is already in an attic, but the first question is what the old material is. If it may be vermiculite, Health Canada advises not to disturb it or attempt to remove it yourself.

Before anyone adds insulation, the contractor needs to look at what is already there. If the existing material is vermiculite, or if there is any uncertainty about what it is, Health Canada's advice is to hire a professional to test for asbestos before any renovation work proceeds. That testing and any removal belong to a different specialty; ottawaabatement.com covers that work.

For loose-fill in an attic, Ontario's Building Code allows it on a sloped surface only up to 4.5 in 12 for mineral or cellulose fibre, and where soffit vents are used, the insulation must be kept from blocking them (9.25.2.4). Baffles keep at least a 25 mm air space and rise at least 50 mm above the insulation (9.19.1.3), and ceiling insulation must not restrict the free flow of air.

For the cost, published 2025 to 2026 estimates for blown-in attic insulation (cellulose or glass fibre) run about $1.50 to $3.00 per square foot of attic floor area. What moves the price within that range is the material chosen, the target R-value and finished depth, and whether any old insulation is removed first rather than buried.

A few things worth confirming with the contractor before work starts:

- What material is already there, and whether it will be tested or removed before new insulation goes in.
- What material the new insulation will be, and what finished depth and R-value the job will reach.
- Whether baffles are in place at the eaves to protect soffit vents.
- Whether any air sealing at the ceiling plane is included in the scope.

Before work begins, make sure you have a written contract that names the material, the finished depth and R-value, the total price, and the date the work will be done.

Q5

What R-value do new Ottawa houses get in the attic?

New Ottawa houses and additions get R-60 in a ceiling with an attic space under package A1 of SB-12, the Building Code's energy standard for housing; packages A3 and A5 allow R-50. These values are for new houses and additions only.

Where the number comes from

Ontario's Building Code does not use Section 9.36 for houses. Instead, it sends residential energy efficiency to SB-12, which divides the province into two climate zones at 5,000 heating degree-days. Ottawa falls in Zone 1, with City Hall measured at 4,440 degree-days and Barrhaven, Kanata and Orleans in the 4,500 to 4,520 range. For a new house with a gas furnace or boiler of at least 92% efficiency, Zone 1's package A1 sets the attic ceiling at R-60. For new houses, other SB-12 packages allow R-50 in the attic together with other upgrades.

For a new house, a ceiling without an attic space gets R-31 under SB-12. Additions follow their own SB-12 table and also require R-60 in the attic.

These are minimum nominal values for the insulation itself. In new work, the rim joist gets at least the above-grade wall value, which under package A1 is R-22.

A few things the builder and insulation contractor need to sort out alongside the R-value:

- Attic venting: the Code requires a ventilated air space between the insulation and the roof sheathing, with vent area at least 1/300 of the insulated ceiling area, at least 25% at the top and 25% at the bottom.
- Baffles at the eaves to keep the vent channel open and stop insulation from blocking soffit vents.
- A continuous air barrier and a vapour barrier on the warm side of the assembly, with all penetrations sealed.

For an existing house that is not being added to, SB-12's new-construction values do not set a required R-value for topping up the attic. We found no Code number for voluntarily upgrading insulation in an existing attic.
If you are building new or adding on, ask which SB-12 package the house is designed to, since the packages trade the attic value against other parts of the house, and ask for the finished depth and the R-value it gives in writing.

Local Ottawa insulation contractors are listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory, and the request form on this page is a straightforward way to reach them.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Insulation Contractors. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any insulation project. Insulation on its own is not named on the City's permit lists, but work that comes with it can need a permit, so ask the City first. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawainsulationcontractors.ca** for the latest answers.