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At Home newsletter Creative ideas for home and garden

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Q: In the 1990s, I had the windows in my 1950s house replaced with ones that are double-pane vinyl. Mold is growing between the panes in one window. I was told this was due to gas leaking. These were supposed to be lifetime windows, but the company I bought them from went out of business. I contacted a current window replacement company, and all it seems to want to do is sell us new windows. New windows are not in the budget. Is there a company that can repair just one window, without charging an arm and a leg?

Reston Glass - Herndon

A: Yes, there are many businesses set up to replace the glass units in vinyl replacement windows. You just need to go to a glass company, not a company that specializes in replacing entire windows.

Reston Glass (703-860-2089; restonglass.com), for example, replaces “thousands and thousands” of double-pane glass units each year, said the general manager, Jacob Curtis. He estimated that it’s about half of the company’s business.

The problem isn’t gas leaking out of the windows but condensation that occurs because the seal around the edging that separates the glass pieces is never perfect. Moist, warm air inevitably infiltrates the space, and this moisture condenses as the air cools. Manufacturers add desiccant to the spacer to deal with this, but it eventually gets used up. Then the window clouds up. They are still energy-efficient, just not attractive.

Reston Glass, like many glass shops, makes service calls and will go to a house to measure and install replacement units. But it’s a two-trip process because it usually takes seven to 10 days to have the units fabricated. The price to replace a single unit typically runs \$250 to \$300, Curtis said, although the exact amount depends on the window size and whether you want coated glass to boost energy savings. If five or more windows need work, the price drops by 10 to 20 percent because the cost of travel time, which is worked into the price, is spread out over more windows.

You can get the price down to about \$150 a window if you don’t need the company to go to your house. Curtis said many customers remove the glass unit themselves, take it to his shop to measure, then go home and reinstall it while the new unit is being made. When the new unit arrives, they return and pick it up.

Either way, the company offers a 10-year warranty against the windows fogging up. As you’ve learned, product warranties aren’t worth anything if a company doesn’t stay in business, so checking on a company’s history is always a good idea. Reston Glass advertises that it’s been serving Northern Virginia for more than 30 years.