

What to Expect During an Insulated Glass Unit Replacement

If you have lived in North Texas for more than a few summers, you have probably seen it happen. A double-pane window that once looked clear starts showing a cloudy haze between the panes. Sometimes it looks like a thin film of water, other times like a patch of fog that refuses to clear. That is foggy glass, and it happens because the seal on the insulated glass unit has failed. When that seal breaks, the insulating gas inside escapes and moist air creeps in. The moisture combines with the desiccant inside the spacer until the desiccant is saturated, and then condensation forms. Once you see that fog, the window cannot be restored by wiping or cleaning. The only real fix is an insulated glass unit replacement.

How a Double-Pane Window Works

A modern double-pane window is not just two pieces of glass glued together. It is a carefully engineered assembly. Two panes of glass are separated by a spacer that holds desiccant, and the space between them is filled with an inert gas fill like argon gas. The whole edge is sealed with a primary and secondary window sealant, often a combination of polyisobutylene and silicone sealant. The goal is to create a sealed air space that improves thermal efficiency and reduces condensation on the interior surface. A low-e coating is often applied to one of the panes to reflect heat back into the room in winter and keep it out in summer.

When everything works, a double-pane window gives you an R-value far better than single glass. But the seal is the weak point. Over time, temperature swings, sun exposure, and even the settling of the house can stress the frame seal. Once that seal fails, the window becomes a single-pane unit in terms of energy performance. The foggy glass is not just an eyesore. It is a sign that you are losing heat or cool air through that window every day.

Signs You Need a Glass Replacement

Fog between the panes is the most obvious clue, but it is not the only one. Sometimes you see a slight rainbow sheen inside the glass, which is oxidation of the low-e coating caused by moisture. Other times you notice the window feels drafty even when it is closed. If you hold a lighter or a candle near the edge of the window and the flame flickers, you have a seal failure that is letting air move through the gap. Condensation on the inside of the glass on a dry day can also point to a failed seal, though that can also be a sign of high indoor humidity. If the condensation is between the panes, the seal is definitely gone.



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Some homeowners try to ignore a single foggy pane, especially if it is in a less visible spot. But the damage does not stay static. Once moisture gets inside, it can start to degrade the desiccant further and even cause the glass to etch over time. That etching is permanent. It can also put extra stress on the surrounding frame and the adjacent windows. In a vertical window, the problem might stay contained. In a sliding glass door, the weight and movement of the panel can make a failing unit worse, and eventually the glass could crack or the door could become hard to slide.

What Insulated Glass Unit Replacement Involves

An [insulated glass unit replacement](#) means removing the entire sealed assembly from the frame and installing a new one. It is not a repair of the old glass. The old unit is taken out, the frame is cleaned and inspected, and a new double glazing unit is put in its place. The new unit will have fresh desiccant, a proper gas fill, and a clean seal. The process depends on how the window was built. Some windows have removable stops that let you pop the glass unit out from the inside. Others require glass unit removal from the exterior, which means working on a ladder and handling tempered glass panels that can be heavy and awkward.

Tempered glass is common in modern windows because it is four to five times stronger than standard glass and breaks into small, relatively harmless pieces if it does shatter. But it also means you cannot cut it down or drill into it after it is made. That is why replacement units must be ordered to the exact dimensions of your frame. A professional will measure the width, height, and thickness of the existing unit, note the type of low-e coating if any, and order a custom-built unit from a glass fabricator. The turnaround time is usually a few days to a couple of weeks, depending on availability.

During the actual replacement, the old unit is carefully removed to avoid damaging the frame. Any old silicone sealant or adhesive is scraped away. The frame must be clean and dry before the new unit goes in. Then the new insulated glass unit is seated, shimmed if needed to keep it square, and sealed in place with fresh silicone sealant. That sealant needs time to cure before the window is fully watertight, so if rain is expected, the crew may tape the edges or schedule the work for a dry day.

Why Gas Fill Matters

One detail that often surprises homeowners is the role of the gas fill. Argon gas is heavier than air and less conductive, so it slows the transfer of heat through the window. When the seal fails, that argon leaks out and is replaced by regular air. The window still looks the same except for the fog, but its thermal efficiency drops significantly. A new insulated glass unit replacement will restore that gas fill. Some high-performance windows use krypton gas, which is even more insulating but also more expensive. For most homes in DFW, argon is the standard choice and works well with low-e coatings to keep summer heat out and winter warmth in.



Cost and Warranty Considerations

The cost of an insulated glass unit replacement varies with the size of the glass, the type of coating, and the complexity of the frame. A small vertical window in a standard wood or vinyl frame is the simplest job. A large sliding glass door panel or a fixed pane in a metal frame takes more labor and a bigger piece of tempered glass. Most reputable companies offer a window warranty on the new unit, typically five to ten years against seal failure. It is important to ask about that warranty and what it covers. Some warranties only cover the glass unit itself, not the labor to replace it if it fails again.

Before committing to a full replacement, some homeowners wonder if they can just replace the glass in a sliding glass door or a large picture window with a standard single pane. That would be cheaper upfront, but you would lose all the benefits of double glazing. Your energy bills

would go up, the room would feel less comfortable, and you would likely have more condensation in winter. It is almost always better to replace like for like, especially if the rest of the window frame is in good shape.

When to Call a Professional

Some DIY guides online show people cutting open the old seal, cleaning the glass, and resealing it themselves. In my experience, that rarely works for long. The seal on a factory-built insulated glass unit is made under controlled conditions with specialized equipment. A DIY reseal usually fails within a year or two because the desiccant is already saturated and cannot be replaced, and the silicone sealant does not bond as well to old glass as it does to new. You end up with the same problem again, plus the cost of your time and materials. For most people, paying for a professional insulated glass unit replacement done right the first time is the cheaper option in the long run.

If you are dealing with multiple foggy windows, it may be worth getting a free estimate from a local company that specializes in glass replacement. They can assess each window, tell you which ones can be replaced with standard units and which might need custom fabrication, and give you a clear picture of the cost. In some cases, if the frames themselves are old or damaged, it might make more sense to replace the whole window. A good estimator will be honest about that and will not try to sell you a glass replacement that will not last because the frame is too far gone.



What to Look for in a Contractor

- Experience with your specific window type, especially if you have older aluminum frames or custom shapes.
- A clear written estimate that lists the cost of the glass unit, labor, and any extra charges for disposal of the old glass.
- A warranty on both the glass unit and the workmanship, with no fine print that excludes seal failure.
- Proper insurance, because handling tempered glass and working on ladders carries real risk.

- References or online reviews that mention similar jobs, like foggy glass repair or sliding glass door replacement.

Replacing a foggy window is one of those home repairs that pays for itself in comfort and energy savings. It also restores the look of your home, both inside and out. A row of clear, seal-tight windows makes a room feel cleaner and brighter. And when the next cold front comes through or the summer sun beats down, you will feel the difference in every room where the work was done.

If you have a sliding glass door that is hard to operate or shows condensation between the panes, a glass replacement will fix both the insulation and the function. The weight of a fogged unit can sometimes cause the rollers to bind, and a new unit is lighter and slides more smoothly. That is a bonus you might not expect until the door glides open with one hand for the first time in years.