

Understanding Energy Star: Introduction

By Stacey Hawkins

Conserving energy and different ways to help the environment are all over the news these days. It began with Rick Mercer encouraging Canadians to reduce their green house gas emissions with the 'One Tonne Challenge.' Home builders have started creating Energy Star® homes, and the government has started offering rebates to homeowners who make energy efficient improvements to their existing homes.

Even the resale market is being impacted by the movement to improve a home's energy efficiency. According to the Royal LePage Eco Home Survey released in late 2007, 72 per cent of Canadians say they will look for a green-improved property in their next home purchase, and 63 per cent say they would be willing to pay more for an environmentally friendly home.

Many people know that buying an Energy Star home will save them money on their utility bills, and reduce the negative impact they have on the environment, but to understand why Energy Star homes are the way to go when purchasing a home, it's vital to understand what makes these homes truly more efficient.

There are many different ways that a home builder can receive an Energy Star rating, and that also means that not

all Energy Star homes are created equal. To achieve the rating, a builder essentially chooses features from a menu of different options to reach the criteria required to receive the rating.

Despite the popular myth that creating an Energy Star home is all about increasing a home's insulation, an Energy Star home is essentially a whole house system, made up of many different components that work together to achieve not only energy efficiency, but a healthy, comfortable home.

"Your home is not a laboratory," explains Victor Fiume, general manager of Durham Homes and past president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association (OHBA). "The technology used in Energy Star homes is all tried and true, put together in a way that makes sense."

When deciding to purchase an Energy Star home, or when making changes to an existing home to improve its efficiency, it's important to understand how each component works, and what benefits it provides to you as the homeowner.

Over the next ten weeks, Victor Fiume will explain the components that create an Energy Star Home, including Proper Sealing of the Outside Walls and Roof, Furnaces, Heat Recovery Ventilators (HRVs), Windows, Appliances, Below and Above Grade Insulation, Framing

Energy
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Series

Part One



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techniques, Furnace Ducting and Return Air Systems, and Passive Solar Energy Techniques.

Homeowners in the resale market can also reap the benefits of energy efficiency by incorporating some of the components into their homes.

But before delving deeper into understanding how an Energy Star home works or ways that homeowners can improve their efficiency, the first question that needs to be answered is, *why become more energy efficient?*

One of the advantages to living in an Energy Star home is that the payback is immediate.

"Because of the continuous monthly savings on utility bills, it doesn't cost more to live in a better home," explains Victor.

Energy Star homes are designed from the ground up, and the system is already in place by the time the homeowner moves in.

This means that the homeowner doesn't have to do anything, except enjoy the comfort and the savings and know that they are reducing their green house gas emissions just by living in the house. On average, most Energy Star homes produce one and a half to two tonnes less green house gas emissions per year than a home built to OBC standards.

From maintaining temperature to reducing humidity, an Energy Star home not only saves home owners money, but it provides them with a healthier more comfortable home.

Next week: House Sealing