

How Do I Save Money This Winter? - Look for an Energy Star Home!

When it comes to building a home, there are many choices in style and materials. A choice that is becoming more prevalent is Energy Star. We've all seen Energy Star ratings and symbols on our appliances, but did you know that your entire house can be rated Energy Star?

In 1992 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) introduced ENERGY STAR as a voluntary labeling program designed to identify and promote energy-efficient products to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Currently there are more than 2,500 home builders who have constructed more than 400,000 Energy Star qualified homes in the United States, including close to 10 percent of the new housing starts in 2004. Over the next 20 years, Energy Star qualified homes will save homeowners more than \$2 billion in utility bills, while eliminating more than 7 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Rick Tozier, owner of Sonoma Building Company in Winston-Salem, builds Energy Star homes in and around the Triad. "It's about doing what's right and having a vision for the future", states Rick. "The payback in lower energy costs over the life of the home is only one benefit of Energy Star. The house is also more comfortable and delivers better protection against cold, heat, drafts, moisture, pollution, and noise."

The average family spends \$1,900 a year on energy bills, nearly half of which goes to heating and cooling. The EPA has a new interactive tool, ENERGY STAR @ home, that allows homeowners to take a virtual tour of a home and learn how they can make energy-efficient improvements in each room. (You can find this tool at www.energystar.gov, choose 'home energy analysis'.)

"Existing homes can also take advantage of Energy Star by using these techniques in remodeling and taking advantage of the energy analysis available online," states Tozier. "The entire house will not be rated Energy Star, but improvements can lead to future savings and comfort."

Danny Gough, a certified Energy Star home energy rater, shows the comparison of purchasing an Energy Star home over a standard home on his website, www.energysolutionsnc.com. The cost might be 5% more, but the savings add up every year. On top of that, if a certified energy rater determines that the homeowner will save a certain amount per year in energy costs, that amount can be added to the borrower's annual income when determining eligibility for a loan.

Individual actions at home can add up to a lot of pollution prevention. Consider these facts:

- If just one in ten households bought ENERGY STAR heating and cooling products, the change would keep over 17 billion pounds of pollution out of the air.
- The average home has roughly two TVs, a VCR, a DVD player and three telephones. If these items were replaced with ENERGY STAR models, it would save over 25 billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent to taking over 3 million cars off the road.
- If just one in 10 homes used ENERGY STAR qualified appliances, the change would be like planting 1.7 million new acres of trees.

“An Energy Star home may cost up to 5% more, but the real cost of home ownership includes the price you pay for the home, plus on-going maintenance and energy costs for as long as you live there,” says Gough. Why? “Because houses use energy every day and energy can be expensive. Smart shoppers recognize that sometimes it is smarter to spend a little more up front which can save hundreds of energy dollars in the long-term.”

Energy efficient choices can save families about a third on their energy bill with similar savings of greenhouse gas emissions, without sacrificing features, style or comfort. As well, the Energy Star house is healthier, both for the residents of the home and for the residents of this planet.