



Times-News

TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD ENERGY EFFICIENCY

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ECO NOTES



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In any twelve step program, the first step is usually acknowledgement of the problem. When it comes to energy, there are many indicators that tell us that action needs to be taken. Do energy costs exceed \$200 in any month? Was the house built before the 1990s? Is there an attic or crawl space? Are there insulated walls, floors, air ducts or attics? Is the HVAC system older than 15 years? Does the AC or heat system continuously run in the summer/winter? Are some rooms too uncomfortable because of cold, heat, or mold smells?

Taking steps to become more energy efficient is not only about being more conscious of the outdoor environment, although that's important. Most of our energy in WNC is supplied by coal and most of that coal comes from mountaintop removal, a technique that devastates Appalachian communities to the north of us. However, shoring up energy problems also has to do with human health inside the home, an environment that's often forgotten. Home energy inspectors often find that inefficient energy systems result in flue gases leaking into the home which can lead to fires, illness or even death. Radon gases are a leading cause of cancer in the mountains and can easily be identified and resolved.

No one wants to spend big bucks in these economic times, but we also don't want leaky wallets dissipating our hard earned cash. Imagine finding that someone was charging your credit card account \$100-\$200 a month without your knowledge. You'd be crazy not to take action. But that's exactly what happens when our homes are poorly insulated, heated and cooled by inefficient systems or have broken duct work. Many ECO members who have had home energy inspections are surprised at how many little things they can do to make their home more energy efficient without shelling out a lot of cash. That's why we urge everyone to avail themselves of ECO's Project Green Light program and schedule a discounted home energy inspection.

Some of the immediate steps that can be taken today that cost little or nothing include:

Install a programmable thermostat to better control the HVAC system when you are away or sleeping. Close drapes and pull shades at night. Use fans to cool air at night and in the morning. Reduce water heater to 120 degrees. Use cold water for clothes washing and dishwasher. Buy Energy Star appliances which often pay back within a very short timeframe. Line dry clothing. CFL bulbs can cut 80% from lighting costs. Consider green energy systems such as solar hot water. And get paid for your good deeds -- homeowners who make their homes more energy efficient are entitled to government tax credits of up to \$1500 and major installations such as going solar could entitle homeowners to 65% rebates from NC and the Feds!

The Southern Energy and Environment Expo (www.seeexpo.com) held at the WNC Ag Center on August 21-23 is a perfect opportunity to learn more about making our homes more energy efficient and what green energy alternatives exist. One of the featured events of the SEE Expo is ECO's Green Home Tour which showcases beautiful homes -- many of which were built or renovated by the homeowners themselves -- demonstrating green technology that didn't break the bank. The Tour is scheduled for Saturday, August 22nd from 10-4 and tickets are available now online at ECO's website at www.eco-wnc.org, or at the Hendersonville and Asheville Visitors' Centers as well as many other locations around town.

David Weintraub is Executive Director of ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, which is dedicated to protecting the mountain region's natural heritage. ECO can be reached at (828) 692-0385 or online at www.eco-wnc.org.