Homebuyers recognize the value of energy efficiency

Bill MacLean knows a lot about how new home buyers view energy efficiency. The company he works for is in the home building business, and as marketing manager, Bill keeps careful track of how families react to his company's products. Bill's interest in buyer response to energy-efficient features is easy to understand: his company, Tartan Homes Ltd. of Ottawa, is heavily committed to constructing energy-efficient homes. Tartan has built 150 houses with energy-saving systems. A number of these have been built under the Government of Canada's R-2000 program, which encourages builders to construct super energy-efficient homes. With annual heating costs as low as $250. Tartan's homes have certainly met the energy-efficient goals set for them.

Bill finds that the public's understanding of the value of energy efficiency is increasing, but some problems still exist. "Everybody is paying more attention to energy efficiency, but a lot of consumer education is still needed," he says. The major source of confusion among consumers about energy efficiency results, ironically, from the success that builders have had in developing contemporary energy-efficient designs. Until recently, publicity on energy-efficient homes centred on fairly radical-looking buildings that bore little resemblance to most existing homes. In contrast, many builders are now producing homes that are both energy efficient and available in all of the popular designs.

The important differences are largely invisible. High insulation levels result in slightly thicker walls, but many homebuyers don't even notice this. The airtight construction of these homes, while critically important to their efficiency, is not visibly apparent. Careful window placement takes advantage of available solar heat but does not affact appearance. Overall, energy efficiency is the result of careful design and engineering combined with new construction techniques. For the homebuyer, conditioned to buying largely on the basis of appearance, these differences can be difficult to understand.

The advantages of an energy-efficient home are, of course, largely economical. Over the years, energy savings of 70 per cent or more add up to a lot of money. The initial cost premium for these homes is tied to the recognition that energy costs are just as important a consideration as the amount of monthly mortgage payments. Both costs are paid out of the same pocket—the homeowner's. Savings from energy efficiency can more than offset the slightly higher mortgage payments of these homes so that, overall, they cost less to own and operate.

For Bill MacLean, increasing the homebuyers' awareness of the value of energy-efficient housing is part of the job. A decade after the energy crisis, progressive housing developers are responding to the reality of high energy costs. As more and more consumers come to understand the advantages of such homes, energy-efficient housing may become the rule rather than the exception.

The Independent Georgetown

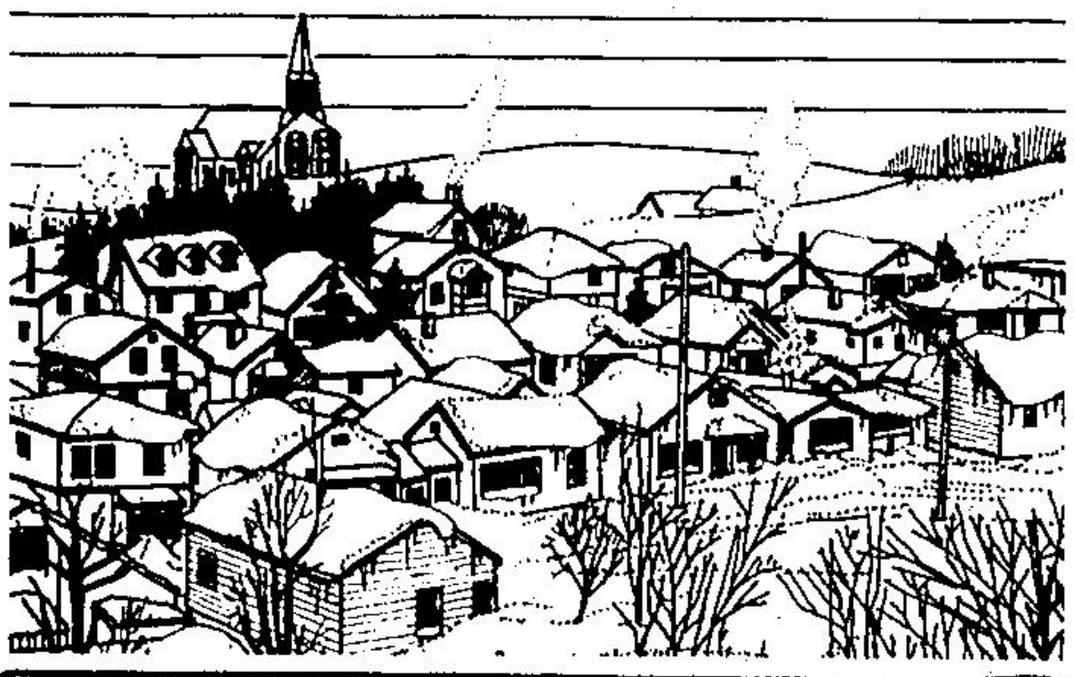
HOME ENERGY MANAGEMENT

A PLANNED APPROACH TO SAVING ENERGY DOLLARS

The Acton Free Press

Wednesday, Oct. 31, 1984

A Metroland Community Newspaper



Turning down the heat — automatically

By now, everybody knows that the easiest way to save a few dollars on their heating bill is to turn down the furnace thermostat. Chances are you've probably done this already and had no trouble adjusting to slightly lower indoor temperatures.

Lowering the thermostat is a good first step, but what about all those times when everyone in the house is asleep or out? You can probably manage to turn the heat down then as well, but you won't always remember. Even when you do, you'll have to wait to get temperatures back to normal.

The obvious solution is a thermostat that will make these adjustments automatically. Unlike many modern conveniences that cost money, this one will pay for itself in a very short time and continue to pay dividends for years.

Clock thermostats are the least expensive and can be preset for one or more setback periods each day. Fully programmable models are available also. These allow for more flexibility in setback schedules. For example, the most sophisticated models can accommodate a complex weekly schedule that looks after your daily comings and goings and alters the schedule on the weekends.

All of these thermostats can be used with either forced air or water circulating heat distribution systems. With hot water circulation, the only difference is that setback periods start earlier and end earlier to compensate for the volume of water in the boiler and circulation pipes.

These products are reliable and inexpensive, and guarantee that you get the fullest advantage from turning down the heat. Energy savings of up to 20 per cent are not uncommon, and with today's heating costs this is good news indeed.

Simple steps toward energy savings

Developing a step-by-step approach to energy management in your home is the best way to get results for your money. Doing it right can save you money now and guarantee that your future energy costs will be reduced.

Every situation is unique, but the following steps cover most of what you need to consider for wise home energy management.

STEP 1. EVALUATE, GET ADVICE

Expert advice is only a phone call away.

Energy, Mines and Resources Canada (EMR) operates the HEATLINE, a toll-free telephone advisory service in Ottawa (1-800-267-9563; in British Columbia 112-800-267-9563) for those who want to save energy but need consultation about what to do in their specific situation.

The free Ener$ave analysis of heat loss

The Ener$ave Home Energy Analysis is a free service offered by EMR. Answer Ener$ave's simple 30-point questionnaire and mail the completed form. The analysis assesses the energy efficiency of your house and helps determine the best ways to invest in caulking, weatherstripping and insulation.

Do-it-yourself analysis

Check for cracks and gaps around doors, windows, the foundation sill plate, electrical outlets on exterior walls, ceilings and the attic. During such an analysis, existing insulation levels should be measured to see where improvements are required.

Utility or commercial home energy analysis

Many utility companies offer home energy analysis as a service. Call your local utilities to see if this service is available.

A growing number of energy audit companies offer consultation, computerized air leakage measurements and infrared heat detection.

STEP 2. MAKE THE MOST OF LOW-COST AND NO-COST ENERGY-SAVING OPPORTUNITIES

There are many simple ways to save energy; turning lights out in unoccupied rooms, closing fireplace dampers and taking advantage of the sun's heat are just a few. Can you make use of the examples offered here in your home?

Turn thermostats down

For each degree (Celsius) you lower your thermostat during an eight-hour period, you will save nearly two per cent of your daily space heating costs.

Install a programmable thermostat

Programmable or clock thermostats perform scheduled temperature setbacks automatically.

Use your windows

On winter days, open blinds or drapes to allow the sun into living areas. Close window coverings at sunset in winter. In summer, use window coverings to keep out the sun's heat. Open windows at night for cross ventilation. Keep most windows shut during the daytime.

Lower hot water temperature

A substantial saving in water heating can be obtained by reducing the heat setting on your hot water tank.

Fix leaky hot water faucets. Wrap hot water pipes and tank with insulation

Insulating jacket kits are available from many hardware stores and some utilities. There are safety concerns about the insulation of some water heaters. Phone or write your gas or electrical utility before proceeding.

Use outdoor clotheslines whenever possible

Shop for energy-efficient appliances

Look for and compare the Energuide rating, which lists the typical monthly energy consumption for new major appliances. A low energy rating means long-term energy savings.

Improve appliance performance

Clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers are most efficient when used for full loads.

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