

## The value of an R2000 home

The R-2000 Home is, to my mind, a good news story with several important dimensions. Today, this technology is proven and ready for full commercialization by the home building industry. The R-2000 homes built to date have demonstrated that the concept works - delivering quality construction, a comfortable, healthy indoor environment and outstanding energy efficiency.

Three points come to mind when I think about the R-2000 Home Program. The first is the high quality of this uniquely Canadian product. The second is the effort and enthusiasm shown by builders across the country in taking up R-2000 technology. Third, there is the growing public recognition of the value of R-2000 homes, epitomized by the positive comments that R-2000 homeowners continue to make about their homes. I want to touch briefly on each of these points before turning the podium back to Hugh.

Today quality is a major selling feature with homebuyers. R-2000 homes answer this need in a number of important ways. The high level of energy efficiency built into each R-2000 home will prove of lasting value, and provides homeowners, and the nation, with increased energy security. Despite currently low world oil prices, it is important to remember that homes built today will be consuming energy for many decades into the future. Energy conservation is still a solid investment because it provides us with greater economic freedom over the long run. Our government maintains its commitment to energy conservation, particularly when, as with the R-2000 Home Program, it meets other important needs of industry and the public at large.

The quality of R-2000 homes starts with energy efficiency, but doesn't end there. More rigorous inspection and quality assurance by the industry contribute to a high level of workmanship in these homes.

The use of continuous mechanical ventilation in every R-2000 home ensures a clean, healthy environment. Monitoring shows that R-2000 homes, when properly constructed and operated, have superior air quality generally and less pollutants than other newly constructed houses.

And there are other benefits built into R-2000 homes. Lower interior noise levels result from a more solid and well insulated structure. The tight construction of R-2000 homes reduces the amount of dust and grime that enter the home. And energy-efficient construction doesn't only lower heating costs, it virtually eliminates cold drafts and produces an even temperature throughout the home. These are all benefits that meet the needs of today's homebuyers.

Taken together, these features contribute to a quality home environment for Canadian families. R-2000 homes were developed here in Canada to meet the needs of Canadians and deal with the reality of our climate. R-2000 homes provide a consistent standard of energy performance for all the regions of Canada. It seems fitting to me that we, who know winter so well, should be the first to develop housing to cope with a harsh climate.

The second point I mentioned was the very positive response that the Canadian Homebuilders' Association and other industry groups involved in house construction have had to the R-2000 Home Program. As of today, some 600 builders across Canada completed the special training and certification process needed

Unless they are really in the market for backyard swimming holes, consumers should choose pool builders carefully.

Unfortunate families have lived with ugly and hazardous holes on their properties for months, while battling to get contractors to finish the pools.

"Some people have had holes dug during the spring of one year, but the pool hasn't been finished until mid-summer the next," says Roberta Allan of the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (MCCR). "The builders just keep making excuses. Sometimes it's more than a matter of procrastination. Some unethical contractors start up dozens of jobs at the beginning of the season, grab as much money as they can from customers, then go out of business."

The only way to avoid this problem is to be sure of the builder's integrity by getting recommendations from past customers.

People who already own pools cannot only point you to a good contractor, they may offer some insight into what the purchase will mean to your lifestyle.

There is a certain amount of work and expense involved in maintaining a swimming pool. Pools may raise property values, but generally the increase doesn't cover the initial investment. Also, should you decide to sell the house, the market will be limited to people who want a swimming pool in the backyard.

"After weighing all these factors, if you still want to go ahead, visit your local municipal office to find out what bylaws may affect the project," Ms. Allan says. "You should also ask how and when to apply for any necessary building permits."

Then get at least three contractors to quote on the job and pick a company. If you haven't already done so, get references from the chosen firm and check them out before signing.

Once satisfied the contractor is reliable, examine the contract carefully. It should set out all costs for materials, labor and optional equipment. To protect yourself, get sizes, brands and qualities of materials listed. Insist that the contract also includes a completion date. If the contractor refuses to commit to a specific date find one who will.

Although a written completion date may help motivate the company to get your pool done on time, some firms might still procrastinate. Consider asking a lawyer to include a clause in the contract penalizing the company a certain amount of money for each day completion is delayed.

The contract should also state who is responsible for repairing any property damaged during pool construction.

Keep deposits to about 10 per cent of the total cost of the job, Ms. Allan advises.

Construction costs are normally paid in installments, called progress payments, as each phase of work is finished. Details must be set out in the contract.

Under the Construction Lien Act, buyers must hold back 10 per cent of each progress payment until 45 days following substantial completion of the project. This ensures you cannot be held liable if the contractor fails to pay suppliers or subcontractors.

Get details about all warranties offered on equipment and workmanship included in the contract. If the pool has a liner, insist it is purchased from a manufacturer with local service facilities. Liners can be damaged and it can be expensive to ship them to the United States or another province for repairs.

Pool construction contracts signed in your home can be cancelled by sending a registered letter to the company, within two clear working

days of the signing date.

For more information about home renovation contracts and other consumer issues, contact the Consumer Information Centre at 555 Yonge St., Toronto, M7A 2H6 - (416) 963-1111 or toll free at 1-800-268-1142. Ontario residents with an 807 area code may call the Toronto number collect.

The Canadian Spa and Pool Association-Ontario Swimming Pool Association is also an excellent resource. For information on pools contact the association at Suite 305, 6303 Airport Rd., Mississauga, Ont. L4V 1R8 - (416) 671-1990.

Consumers who feel they have been unfairly treated by a contractor should contact the nearest Consumer Advisory Bureau of the Ministry.

—Courtesy Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Affairs

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