

R-2000 designs cut energy costs up to 80 per cent

Choosing a new home can be a complicated process. Not only do you have to consider location, size, style and purchase price — but also how much your annual energy bill is going to be. With home heating costs expected to rise by as much as 10 to 15 per cent each year, many homebuyers are starting to look at the cost of a home in terms of principal, interest, taxes and energy costs.

A conventionally built home that seems affordably priced can cost substantially more over time than a slightly more expensive energy-efficient home of the same size.

Some homebuyers are discovering how substantial the savings can be after taking possession of one of a new breed of energy-efficient homes.

Designed to save homeowners up to 80 per cent on their annual energy bills, the R-2000 home incorporates state-of-the-art concepts in energy efficiency. Yet at first glance an R-2000 home looks like any other you might find in your neighbourhood. The energy-efficient features are built into the home and are, for the most part, unnoticeable.

Based on concepts developed by Government of Canada researchers and funded under a joint program between Energy, Mines and Resources Canada (EMR) and the Housing and Urban Development Association of Canada (HUDAC), more

than 300 R-2000 homes have been built across the country to demonstrate this new concept.

The R-2000 design makes use of four key features to reduce energy requirements — heavy insulation (two to three times as much as in a conventional house); an air-vapour barrier which seals the house completely; mechanical ventilation, including air-to-air heat exchangers to maintain

indoor air quality; and improved double- or triple-glazed windows, sized and placed to take advantage of free solar heat.

R-2000 homes have other modifications such as air-lock entries and low-powered fluorescent lighting. Energy-efficient appliances are recommended to further reduce energy needs.

The R-2000 program is intended to demonstrate the

value of energy-efficient construction techniques to both the building industry and the home-buying public. In 1983, three hundred home builders were selected to build R-2000 homes. Another 1200 builders received special training in new building techniques through HUDAC seminars. Federal subsidies are provided to builders to offset the extra costs involved in training their employees and in

opening the home for public viewing for one month.

Reports from R-2000 builders indicate that these models are outselling conventional homes in spite of a slightly higher purchase price. The builders say the major selling points are reduced monthly energy costs;

the increased comfort of a quiet, draft-free house; control over ventilation and humidity and the overall quality of construction.

It is expected that thousands of Canadian families will soon be taking advantage of R-2000 efficiency and comfort as this new approach to house construction becomes more widespread. R-2000 homes and others like them still represent only 1 per cent of all new homes. But the R-2000 demonstration program represents a major step in setting the standard for houses of the future.

HEATLINE help a phone call away

For more than six years Canadians from every province and territory have been phoning Ottawa to get helpful and accurate information on how to save energy in their homes. Today the HEATLINE continues to provide a unique service to the energy consumer in search of facts and assistance.

Created in 1977 by Energy, Mines and Resources Canada, the HEATLINE has logged more than 500 000 calls on its national toll-free phone system (1-800-267-9563; in British Columbia 112-800-267-9563). During last November alone, this free service was used by more than 10 000 people. All the more remarkable is the fact that the HEATLINE service is operated by just 20 people.

The HEATLINE provides the public with advice on a wide range of energy-related topics. Household planning insulation, heating system adjustments or other

energy-conserving projects can get comprehensive advice backed by printed information about materials and procedures. Government of Canada grant assistance programs can also be explained by the HEATLINE's staff.

The key to the HEATLINE's success is the high level of training and commitment of its employees. Staffed by program officers and more extensively trained technical officers, the HEATLINE is backed by technical researchers who stay abreast of the rapidly evolving field of home energy management.

Typical of the HEATLINE's staff is Suzane Dubé — a technical officer who has been advising Canadians for more than three years. A new employee would require two years of training to achieve the level of technical expertise Suzane has accumulated. Enthusiastic about her work, Suzane finds that the public appreciates the

straightforward approach of the HEATLINE. "When someone calls me needing information, either I've got it or I'll get it and phone them back," she says. This contrasts with the experience that many consumers have when consulting contractors or material suppliers for information. Suzane recalls one householder who, in frustration, called the HEATLINE after getting incomplete and conflicting advice from a half dozen other sources. "She was at the end of her rope. I gave her so much information, she ran out of paper. After the call she felt she understood enough to deal knowledgeably with contractors and suppliers." Suzane feels that over the last few years the public has learned a great deal about energy use and conservation. "Callers are a lot more knowledgeable now. They want more detailed technical information than a couple of years ago." She notes that

many callers "are really doing their homework before making an energy-related investment."

With the public becoming more careful in planning home energy projects, Suzane feels that the HEATLINE provides a valuable consumer protection service. Many of Suzane's callers have a firm idea about what they want to do and contact the HEATLINE to double check contractor's estimates or claims of potential energy savings.

Suzane receives an average of 125 calls per week. While the average call is only about 10 minutes in length, she will spend as long as 45 minutes with callers who have more complicated problems. When not on the phone, she spends time researching and reviewing technical information provided by the HEATLINE's research staff. She feels this ongoing training is important to keep up with the changing nature

of home energy technologies. Suzane's enthusiasm for her work is typical of the HEATLINE's staff. Although Suzane estimates that she has received more than 18 000 phone calls since she began at the HEATLINE, she still finds working with the public satisfying and interesting.

The public's need for the HEATLINE's services seems similarly constant. A half million calls later, the public still lights up the switchboard looking for help in their efforts to save energy.



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