

# Here's how to reduce energy expenses in your home - Part I

The hot, humid weather we had this summer typically compels us to keep our air conditioners running nonstop.



Stephen Taglione

If you're like me, it isn't until you get your first big summer electric bill that you seriously consider ways to save money and stay cool.

As a builder, I've discovered some relatively easy ways to help my customers cut the costs of energy bills.

First, it's important for customers to understand where their energy dollars are going. In the U.S., the typical household spends \$1,000 to \$1,500 each year on utility bills.

Heating and cooling costs account for up to one-half of that expense, followed closely by the cost of using appliances and lighting, which consume one-third of that amount. The cost of heating water consumes an

additional one-eighth of that amount.

With that in mind, we can focus on the two primary ways to reduce home energy usage.

The first is to purchase and use energy efficient products such as high-efficiency heating and cooling equipment and energy-efficient appliances.

The second way is to conserve as much energy as possible by adopting habits that decrease the amount of energy used to operate homes.

Conservation and efficiency improve that I recommend include the following:

- Set your thermostat at a higher temperature in the summer and a lower temperature in the winter. Even better, install a programmable thermostat. You can then match the heating and cooling of your home to your family's schedule.
- Check and change air filters regularly. Dirty filters can reduce

the efficiency of your air conditioning, heating and ventilation systems.

■ Examine the ratings on any new air conditioning equipment you purchase.

Home-build include central air conditioning units with at least a Seasonal Energy Efficient Ratio (SEER) rating of 12. For room air conditioners, look for units that have a high Energy Efficiency Ratio (EER).

For both types of air conditioners, the higher the SEER or EER rating, the more energy efficient the unit.

■ Consider alternative to cooling your home. Fans and dehumidifiers use less energy than air conditioners.

I will discuss other ways to curtail energy expenses in an upcoming column.

Stephen J. Taglione is the immediate past president of the Building Industry Association of Southeastern Michigan. He's also a master builder with nearly 15 years experience in the industry and president of Westminster Abbey Homes LLC in Bingham Farms.

# Healthy indoor air guidelines

(AP) - Chuck Knight was turned on to the "healthy design" concept when he worked on the new corporate headquarters for the American Lung Association of Minnesota.

The project inspired Knight, an architect, to build his family's home under new health-oriented guidelines developed by that organization.

The Woodbury home, featured in the Parade of Homes Fall Showcase in the Twin Cities, is billed as the first home in the nation to follow the American Lung Association's newly revised builder guidelines.

The guidelines, which focus on indoor air quality, durability and energy efficiency, are an updated version of building practices introduced by the American Lung Association's Health House program in 1993.

The practices cover everything from the foundation, framing and flooring to heating and air conditioning, insulation and the roof.

"I learned a lot from what Health House was doing - what's behind the walls, filters, where mold potential could be - that I was never aware of," Knight said. He was especially motivated to build a "healthy home" because one of his four children suffers from mild asthma.

According to Knight, indoor air quality can be improved by implementing some relatively simple construction and maintenance practices.

The Woodbury house, for example, uses granular fill under the

slab to prevent moisture and mold growth in the home and features large overhangs over the windows and walls to direct rainwater away from the house.

It also has soft foam Icyne insulation in the walls, floors and ceilings. The insulation controls noise and increases energy efficiency, while discouraging harmful allergens and mildew from getting into the home.

Additional features include a state-of-the-art ventilation system, radiant floor heating, a central vacuum system for easy cleaning in each room and tile instead of carpet on the main level.

Tile and wood floors are considered preferable to carpet because they harbor fewer pollutants and are easier to clean.

"When you spill - and you will have spills in the house - all of the moisture will evaporate in the radiant floor system," Knight said. "Just the little things make a world of difference."

Angle Lien, director of the American Lung Association's Health House program, said the program has built more than 120 homes in 35 states. It was developed in response to increased rates of asthma and allergies that coincided with the construction of tighter homes in the 1980s.

The organization estimates that 36 million Americans suffer from allergies or asthma, and many triggers for those maladies - including volatile organic compounds, dust and biological contaminants - can be found in the home.

"In the 1980s, we wanted to save on energy much as we do now," Lien said. "So the construction techniques began to change in tightening up our homes. We didn't bring in enough fresh air and exhaust out the stale air."

"With tightening up the homes, what we did is trap pollutants inside, which can be a health concern, especially if you have asthma and allergies," she said.

Steve Klossner, a Health House technical consultant, said moisture is one of the biggest culprits when it comes to mold growth and poor indoor air quality. In the past, homes were built more tightly without adequate regard to preventing moisture intrusion, he noted.

"And that lent itself to developing biological contaminants, because we got water where we didn't want it," he said. "And it also lent itself to allowing water into our wall and ceiling assemblies, and it would start to grow mold."

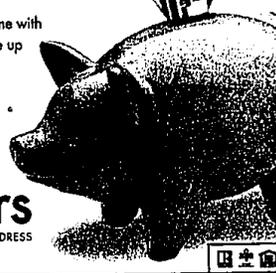
The Woodbury house will be tested for at least a year to monitor how effective the new Healthy Home guidelines are.

"We need good data to show the difference between where we are now and the impact of this kind of house for the future," Knight said.

Although the Woodbury home is a high-end project, Lien noted that homes don't have to be expensive to have quality indoor air.

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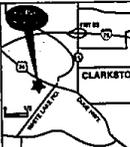
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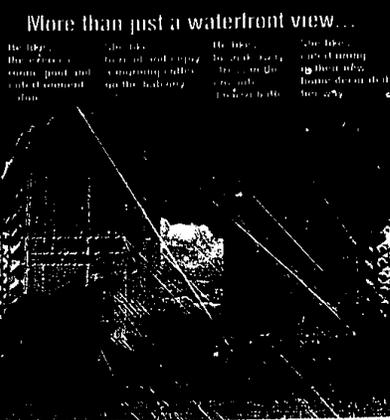
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