

Small spaces: Green Upgrades Start with Energy Savings

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Getting green may not be at the top of Baltimoreans to-do lists when the cold snap of weather settles in, but eco-conscious upgrades frequently double as energy savers.

Although some people are motivated to make environmentally friendly upgrades to their homes, many are seeking the direct benefits of energy cost savings and healthier places for themselves and their families.

The U.S. Green Building Council, a national trade group of green builders, cites these combined benefits for the increase in recent years in the number of green homes being built. Only 2 percent of new houses were green homes in 2005, according to a 2006 McGraw-Hill Construction Residential Green Building SmartMarket Report, but that is expected to grow to 10 percent by 2010.

It's a trend that some are seeing in the Baltimore area in upgrades and improvements people are making to their own homes.

Green Energy Savers

Here are some online resources that can help in save you money in lost home energy:

- » www.greenhomeguide.org from the U.S. Green Building Council has tips on how to make energy-efficient upgrades to existing homes.
- » www.ecobroker.com provides information on energy conservation and links to resources for home renovators.
- » www.dhcd.state.md.us/Website/home/index.aspx is where the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development displays information on its Weatherization Assistance Program for eligible residents.

Amanda Lopez, a Baltimore real estate agent who is certified as an eco-broker by the National Association of Realtors, said environmental upgrades that focus on energy efficiency are in demand at resale time, especially among more highly educated buyers.

"It depends on the neighborhood and the buyer," she said about the financial return on energy upgrades. "The more educated buyer is aware of it and looking for it."

Upgrades with a decent investment return don't have to be pricey. Replacing heavily used lightbulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs; adding aerators to faucets; and using rain barrels to collect water for watering the garden or lawn all have an influence.

Other low-cost and easy energy savers include installation of programmable thermostats and the use of weather stripping on doors, said Peter Van Buren, president of TerraLogos Green Home Services in Baltimore. Also check the dampers on all exhaust fans because old or malfunctioning dampers have the same effect as an open window.



And don't forget about the hot water heater, which is the second-biggest energy user in the home. Simple steps include the installation of tube insulation on your basement's hot water pipes, which allows the homeowner to lower the temperature in the heater and still get piping hot water at the tap. Insulation sleeves for the water heater also can conserve the appliance's energy, but sleeves for any nonelectrical heater should be installed by a professional, Van Buren said.

For a few hundred dollars, an energy audit also can identify major home leaks, which surprisingly are often less related to windows than to poor insulation, according to Van Buren.