

HOME EDITION

...NEWS FROM YOUR REALTOR®



How to Buy a Green Home

BY MICHELLE D. ALDERSON

Ways to Green a Home

- **Use ENERGY STAR Appliances**
ENERGY STAR products meet strict energy-efficiency guidelines set by the EPA and the Department of Energy and use less energy than conventional products.
- **Install Low-VOC Materials**
Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are compounds that vaporize at room temperature and contribute to pollution. Installing low-VOC carpets and natural wood flooring helps reduce these emissions.
- **Use OSB Wood or Recycled Wood**
Oriented-strand board (OSB) is an engineered wood product that can be used on sheathe roofs and walls, reducing the need to cut down trees.
- **Replace Light Bulbs with CFLs**
Note: These bulbs contain mercury and must be disposed of properly and require special precautions in the event they break.
- **Install Solar Paneling**
- **Add Energy-Efficiency Windows**
Low-emittance glass-coated windows can reduce the heat inside your home during the summer and keep it in during the winter.
- **Plant Native Vegetation**
Native plants not only are easier to maintain, but also reduce the need to water and fertilize as much compared with non-native plants.

You have decided to join the fast-growing trend of eco-friendly living and want to purchase a green home. As with so many “green” products currently available, from organic milk to hybrid cars, it’s tough to know if the house you’d like to buy is good for the environment. So how do you determine what makes a house green?

Going Green: Where to Start

The first step is ensuring that the house is built to standard. “Find out if the builder is a member of his or her local home-building association’s green building program,” advises Calli Baker Schmidt, director of environmental communications, National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). NAHB’s Web site (www.nahb.org) is a good resource for this information and features an outline of new home-building green standards, which include: energy, water, and resource efficiency; lot and site development; indoor air quality; global impact; and homeowner education.

Next, contact an EcoBroker®, who can help you find homes that have passed the proper qualifications to be considered green (www.ecobroker.com). An EcoBroker® has undergone specialized training and is knowledgeable in green home standards and can answer your questions. “The EcoBroker® design-

nation allows me to better understand the issues and to convey this understanding to my clients,” asserts Catharine Bramkamp, a certified EcoBroker® with Century 21 Classic Properties, Rohnert Park. An EcoBroker® can also help you find lenders that have cost-saving mortgages for energy-efficient homes.

Want a third opinion? You can get an unbiased evaluation from Build It Green (www.builditgreen.org). This independent, non-profit organization has GreenPoint raters that monitor construction from start to finish for green-certified verification. Another way is to do some research yourself. Online sites such as Home Depot’s eco-friendly product guide (www.homedepot.com/ecoptions) are easy to use and can help you understand the ENERGY STAR label given to appliances.

Buying eco-friendly products is a growing trend with no end in sight. With escalating energy costs, new homes are definitely seeing a surge in building “green”: By the end of 2007, more than half of NAHB’s members had incorporated green practices into the development, design, and construction of new homes. ♦

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