

Spending on your home can save in the long run

(ARA) - Now that warmer weather is here, people are gearing up to make some repairs and updates to their homes. From new roofs and siding to adding state-of-art kitchen and other household appliances, people have more options than ever when it comes to making purchases that can help them save money and the environment.

The ENERGY STAR program, a joint effort from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, is designed to help people save money on their utility bills while reducing greenhouse gasses. In 2008, more than \$19 billion was saved on utility bills through the program. According to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, investing \$3,000 to \$8,000 in your home -- not including rebates -- can result in savings of 10 to 30 percent annually on utility bills.

For people who are looking to sell their homes or simply a good investment, energy-efficient options can make your home more valuable. According to the EPA, a \$1 investment in your home can add about \$20 in value. In other words, for every \$1,000 invested in energy efficiency, you gain about \$20,000 in value.

Colby Swanson, a building and construction expert for BASF, a manufacturer of energy-efficient products for the home, offers these recommendations on how you can save yourself money by making improvements on your house.

* Start with improving the envelope of the building (specifically attic air sealing and insulating) before buying things like a high-efficiency furnace, air conditioner or solar-power cells. The money you may save would be wasted if the building can't contain the expensive conditioned air. Swanson says that air leakage from the house through the ceiling is one of the largest contributors for heating and cooling loss with improperly installed attic insulation close behind. Focusing on attic air sealing and properly installed insulation is generally the most cost effective energy and comfort related improvement in an existing home. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that up to 40 percent of the energy cost of heating and cooling a structure is wasted by uncontrolled air leakage.

"The attic has some of the most extreme weather on the planet," Swanson says. "It's extremely hot in the summer and bitterly cold in the winter. Therefore, air sealing and insulating this extremely harsh environment from the house is crucial."

* BASF makes a product that could save homeowners a lot of money; a polyurethane foam spray, Comfort Foam and Enertite Foam, replaces the conventional, fiberglass or cellulose insulation in the attic and walls. Spray foam is the premium insulating product on the market because of its ability to air seal and insulate at the same time.

"Professionally installed foam in the attic will far outperform the conventional products both in air sealing and insulating capability resulting in much more comfortable homes and substantially lower heating and cooling bills," says Swanson. "Studies indicate that a thorough job of leak sealing can cut your home's total air leakage by 33 to 46 percent -- reducing your heating and cooling bills up to 20 percent. To help further the energy efficiencies of a home and help homeowners remain environmentally conscious, don't dispose of the attic insulation being replaced, recycle it by placing it on top of the newly placed foam."

* Another simple and less costly way for homeowners to make their homes more energy-efficient: apply a radiant barrier coating that is sprayed on the underside of the roof in the attic, which will lower heating and cooling bills and increase comfort. In the summer, it reflects some of the heat that radiates through the roof deck back outside and, to a lesser degree, in the winter reflects heat back into the house. One option is Radiance, made by BASF, a water-based product that can be sprayed on to the underside of the roof or applied with a paint roller.

* After the ceiling is air tight and insulated correctly, consider appliances. Next time you need to replace your home's water heater, consider this: after the furnace and air conditioner it is the biggest user of energy in a house. As of 2009, you can now purchase a water heater certified as an ENERGY STAR appliance.

* Show me the money. Financial help is available. What many homeowners may not know is that they have the opportunity to leverage many rebates provided by local utility and state programs on top of the federal tax incentives to help finance home energy-efficiency investments. These attractive rebates and incentives vary widely (approximately 5 percent to 50 percent savings) to help off-set a homeowners investment to air seal, insulate or purchase high efficiency appliances. The federal government offers a 30 percent rebate of up to \$5,000 on energy investment.

Go to www.dsireusa.org to find out more about rebates and incentives in your area.

Courtesy of ARAccontent