

Want to save more? Time for home improvement

Part two of a three-part series

Okay, you've sealed every window, adjusted your habits and have seen good results on your electric bill. Problem is, you're greedy and want to save more money.

At this point, to update an old adage, to save money, sometimes you have to spend money.

When you buy a new appliance, consider spending a little bit more on an Energy Star-compliant machine. The higher initial cost will be offset by more efficient energy usage. Energy Star appliances include air conditioners, heaters, washing machines, refrigerators and computers. Check out energystar.gov for more savings tips.

If you're in the market for a new air conditioning unit, pay attention to the seasonal energy efficiency ratio, or SEER. In January 2006, the minimum SEER was raised to 13, which provides 30 percent savings over the old industry standard of 10. For energy maximum efficiency, go with a high SEER and make sure the unit is properly sized for your home or business.

Also take a look at your roof and attic. If it's time to re-roof, do due diligence on energy efficient roofing materials. While it may cost more up front, energy-efficient roofing material saves energy by reducing the solar energy that enters your home, thereby saving on the cost of air conditioning.

Roofs account for 50 percent or more of the excess solar heat removed by air conditioning systems.

While your roof is being worked on, take time to properly seal your attic and add extra insulation if you have less than 7 inches. Insulation is measured in R-values. In our area, R-38 is recommended for attic and R-15 for walls. And while you're up there, don't forget to fix the leaks in your ventilation system's ducts.

Adding insulation to your walls as well replacing old windows with energy-efficient windows will also will reduce your energy bill by keeping conditioned air in the house.

And as a bonus benefit, you may increase the value of your home while adding new creature comforts. For more guidance on home improvements, contact a reputable contractor.



Lennox International Inc.

Energy efficiency mortgages available

By Chris Dorsi
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The cost of owning a home may soon decrease for the owners of energy-efficient houses. Thanks to recent changes in mortgage lending rules among U.S. banking institutions, the value of energy efficiency measures, such as attic insulation or energy-efficient heating systems, can now be included in the calculations used to qualify borrowers for home loans.

The new energy mortgages come in two varieties:

- For the purchase of new homes, the Energy Efficient Mortgage allows lenders to consider how much fuel the home will use in the future. Since efficient homes tend to have lower utility costs, this mortgage allows borrowers to apply those monthly savings toward the purchase of a more expensive home.
- For improvements to existing homes, the Energy Improvement Mortgage can be used to finance the installation of new energy-efficiency measures.

Both mortgages allow homeowners to build equity faster by taking advantage of their home's efficiency.

Efficient homes provide benefits that go beyond fuel savings. They are warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, and because they are less drafty, they provide a cleaner, quieter, and more comfortable indoor environment. And if you choose to sell your efficient home, it may be more valuable, too. A recent report in the *Appraisal Journal* estimated that the market value of your home could increase by \$20 for every \$1 decrease in your annual energy costs. All the major underwriters of residential mortgages – including FannieMae, Freddie Mac, HUD, and the VA – now offer special loans for energy efficient homes. Ask your local lender for details.

