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Around the Columns

Saving with energy audits

With help from a new federal program proposed by President Barack Obama for 2010, homeowners could soon see permanent savings on their energy bills. Dubbed “Cash for Caulkers,” the program will use unspent money from the 2009 Recovery Act to reimburse homeowners for making their homes more energy efficient. It’s speculated that the federal government will offer up to \$12,000 per home for upgrades.

While the White House is still working on the language of the program with Congress, MU Extension’s Human Environmental Sciences department already offers help for homeowners seeking effective solutions from reliable green builders.

The first step of any home improvement plan involving energy efficiency upgrades is to have an energy audit. Energy audits use two technologies to pinpoint areas in a home where heat loss occurs due to poor insulation: the blower door test and the thermographic (infrared) scan.

“The best energy auditors, which often carry certification from the U.S. Energy Department’s Energy Star program, perform both of those tests on a given house,” said Mike Goldschmidt, assistant professor and state housing environmental design specialist.



The Residence on Francis Quadrangle, home to Chancellor Brady Deaton and wife Anne, is arguably the most famous — and only — home on campus. If the cold winter months make you wish your home was more energy efficient, start with an energy audit. Photo by Rob Hill

After gathering the results from an energy audit, homeowners can then hire a contractor to make the necessary upgrades. Goldschmidt points out, however, that consumers can easily accomplish some weatherization techniques — such as applying weather stripping and caulk — without a contractor.

Weatherizing your home cuts energy consumption, decreasing the impact on the environment, reducing utility bills, and making your home more marketable.

“In the Midwest, homes that have been through a thorough weatherization process can see a saving of 30% on their energy bills,” says Goldschmidt. “Your costs to weatherize are recouped quickly, and some state energy offices are already offering rebates and tax credits for energy audits and efficiency efforts.”

The Obama administration argues this proposed program would bolster efforts to build a new green economy. For those seeking out ways to save money in 2010, Cash for Caulkers may be a way to bring their tax dollars back home.

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