

energy-efficient ideas

BY TOM LEBOUR

If there is one thing on which all homeowners can agree, it's that there's always something to do around the house.

If you're developing a list of improvements to get underway this spring, be sure to include energy-efficiency enhancements, which contribute to your home's overall value while also reducing your energy costs.

If you have an older home, renovations such as new windows, extra insulation or an ENERGY STAR-rated furnace can sizably diminish your energy costs. You can even qualify for government rebates to help you through the process.

There are a number of minor changes you can also undertake to make a big difference in your monthly energy bills. It's estimated, for example, that you can save two per cent on your heating bill for every degree that you lower your thermostat. Replacing your old thermostat with an ENERGY STAR programmable unit that automatically adjusts while you're asleep or out of the house, is therefore well worth the cost.

Consider that adding a little caulking and weather stripping around doors and windows can also have a positive cumulative effect. If you have a traditional fireplace, be sure to close the damper or preferably, have a natural-gas insert installed so that warm air isn't needlessly drawn out of your home.

Even your approach to landscaping can affect your heating and cooling bills. Plant deciduous trees on the south and west sides of your property to offer shade in the summer, and coniferous trees on the north and east perimeter to provide a wind barrier in the winter.

Similarly, consider opening window coverings to allow the sun to warm a room and close them at night to help insulate it.

Simple swaps like CFL bulbs or low-flow showerheads and toilets will also contribute to



your home's energy efficiency and often come with added money-saving rebates. A tankless water heater can save you up to \$100 per year as well, by only providing the hot water that is needed rather than maintaining it in a cylinder.

Where electronics are concerned, shut off energy usage completely by unplugging them and with respect to appliances, replace them where possible with ENERGY STAR-rated units. Refrigerators, for example, comprise 11 per cent of a home's energy consumption and today's units use 50 per cent less energy than those made 10 years ago.

Look for self-cleaning ovens because their added insulation means greater efficiency. Use a microwave or toaster oven for smaller meals.

Choose front-loading washers, which use 40 per cent less water and 50 per cent less energy than top-loading models. Select a dryer with a sensor that automatically turns the machine off when clothes are dry. Most importantly, keep all of your appliances clean and fully loaded for maximum efficiency.

Contributing to a better tomorrow doesn't have to require a large investment. To learn about features that are in demand in today's housing market, talk to a Greater Toronto Realtor and visit the Web site at TorontoRealEstateBoard.com for full details on government programs that are available to help your home function at its best.



Tom Lebour is president of the Toronto Real Estate Board, a professional association that represents 29,000 Realtors in the Greater Toronto Area