



Don't Take This for Granted

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TREB PRESIDENT'S COLUMN AS IT APPEARS IN THE TORONTO SUN

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With the latest Energy Star rated appliances and fixtures, every resale home can tackle environmental efficiency one fix-up at a time.

I spoke with REALTORS Chris Chopik, Eldon Freeman, Tom Lebour and Keith Tarswell who are well informed on environmentally friendly properties for tips on creating an environmentally friendly home.

If, for example, you're thinking of replacing windows, it's recommended that you ask for Low-E glass with argon gas fill, for greater efficiency.

Small steps like plugging electronics into a power bar that can be switched off when not in use will reduce the phantom load and your electricity bill. In the future, watch for rooms wired with a single "all-off" switch to serve the same purpose.

Replacing your traditional light bulbs with CFLs or LEDs is another simple way to reduce costs. Some homeowners are even turning to solar lighting, in which a panel that is installed on your roof feeds energy through a tube into the house.

Rooftop solar panels can also be used for hot water and many swimming pool owners have discovered this innovative alternative. Tankless water heaters are another smart solution. They heat only the water you need instead of continuously warming an enormous cylinder.

Heating is a key factor in your home's energy efficiency. Today's high-efficiency gas furnaces are less expensive than their predecessors and one of the best investments you can make. For a nominal fee you can also have infrared photos taken of your house to show where heating and cooling losses are occurring. The power of a simple tube of caulking cannot be emphasized enough.

Other creative options include hanging insulating drapes on north and east exposures and keeping the blinds closed on south and west windows during summer. Even landscaping can make a difference. Deciduous trees should be planted on the south and west sides of your property to keep it cool in summer and well-lit in winter, while coniferous trees planted along north and east lines can serve as a wind barrier.

Transforming your home into an eco-friendly oasis doesn't have to happen overnight. You can commission an environmental audit to analyze your home's energy characteristics and for recommendations.

Given that our government encourages energy efficiency, there are many cost-saving programs and rebates on everything from low-flow faucets and toilets to air conditioners and full-scale environmental audits.

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Greater Toronto Area REALTORS are dedicated to enhancing their education on all environmental issues and programs available in order to offer the consumer the most up-to-date information.

TREB is leading edge when it comes to offering comprehensive educational courses to REALTORS. In fact, REALTORS® can participate in an entire education stream dedicated to greening from a real estate perspective at TREB's annual REALTOR QUEST Trade Show and conference.

Call a REALTOR® and inquire about environmental fix-ups you wish to pursue. In future, this will add to the value of your property.

For more information on subjects like this, visit www.TorontoRealEstateBoard.com. Maureen O'Neill is President of the Toronto Real Estate Board, a professional association that represents 27,000 REALTORS® in the Greater Toronto Area.