



# Green built homes can benefit your health and finances

**W**ant to build a new home or remodel an existing home while helping protect the environment?

Experts say the solutions may begin with Green Built Homes and Energy Star Programs; both designed to save you money and protect natural resources.

The Built Green Grand Traverse Program is a voluntary green building program that serves as a blueprint for healthy, comfortable homes that reduce utility bills and protect the environment.

According to the Home Builders Association of the Grand Traverse Area, Inc., any size and type of building can be a Built Green if it follows the recommended program.

There are several components considered in "building green," said Max Strickland, a Traverse City builder promoting environmentally friendly builds.

Each component takes into account the impact a build has on the health of the planet and the well being of the homeowner.

Those building a Green Built home take everything into account, from the environmental impact of the build site to the kinds of materials put in the home.

Not only are Green Built homes required to be more energy efficient than standard-built homes (exceeding efficiency levels specified in the

International Energy Efficiency Code by at least 20 percent), but they're also built in such a way as to use water more efficiently, further protect the environment with healthy landscaping, and reduce indoor levels of environmental pollutants.

"The Environmental Protection Agency did a study several years ago," said Strickland. "They found that the air in a typical home or workplace is five to 10 times worse than the air outdoors."

Chemicals in the carpet, Radon gas, and even glues found in some furniture and cabinetry all compound to make the air we breath a little less healthy. Green Built homes attempt to limit or eliminate those chemicals whenever possible.

Green Built builders are expected to make their best efforts to:

- Employ recycled, renewable, and previously used but structurally sound building materials wherever feasible and permissible.

- Minimize waste, spillage, pilferage, spoilage and misuse of building materials.

- Maximize energy and water use efficiency by exceeding local energy standards in building code for site planning, thermal insulation and mechanical systems, and installing a mechanical home ventilation system.

- Reduce indoor levels of Radon gas and formaldehyde emis-

sions by following industry and US EPA guidelines on indoor environmental quality.

- Provide consumer operating and maintenance information for best performance in this project through careful planning, specification, job site management and labor supervision.

The American Lung Association estimates that the cost of purchasing a "green" home will be approximately 10 percent higher than a traditional build. But Strickland said that consumers will typically recoup those costs through energy savings and lower maintenance costs.

Another program — working hand in hand with Green Built — is called Energy Star. All Energy Star-labeled new homes are certified to meet the EPA's strict guidelines for energy efficiency.

To earn the Energy Star label, a home must be verified to be at least 30 percent more energy-efficient in its heating, cooling and water heating than a comparable home built to the Model Energy Code.

The Energy Star label

is earned only after the home's energy efficiency is verified, either by an independent third-party or by adhering to the quality control procedures established for HUD - code manufactured homes.

A home is only labeled Energy Star when it meets these rigorous standards:

- Tight construction (for reduced air infiltration).

- Tight ducts.

- Improved insulation.

- High performance windows.

- Energy efficient

heating & cooling equipment.

And there may be further financial incentives in the offing for those who choose to go "green," said Strickland.

"Some states, like New York and Pennsylvania, have tax breaks for people who build more energy-efficient homes, and a handful of other states are working on programs," he said.

Strickland expects the trend to reach Michigan: "I do believe we'll have a program to give tax breaks one day."

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