

Building your business
on energy efficiency



Building Up

Fall/Winter 2009-2010



The number of new energy-saving products and services is growing rapidly as energy prices rise and entrepreneurs race to join the new green economy. Unfortunately, some of those entering this new market have inadequate information about the products they are selling or how well they actually perform. In the worst cases, homeowners are being misled by lofty claims of energy savings and making unwise, often large, investments in questionable products.

It is critical that people make informed decisions and have a clear understanding about energy performance and operation standards. This issue of *Building Up* discusses how you can provide customers with realistic options to manage energy usage and meet cost goals—while helping them avoid dubious home energy investments.

The annual Energy Design Conference & Expo in Duluth is a valuable resource for learning about best practices and energy-efficiency options. Help us celebrate the 20th anniversary of this event February 22-24, 2010. Share your stories of how the conference has helped you build your business on energy efficiency at www.duluthenergydesign.com.

Hope to see you there.

Dean Talbott

Energy Program Specialist

GREENWASH OR HOGWASH

Beware of Dubious Claims

If you own a television or computer, you probably have seen headlines touting the amazing energy- and money-saving qualities of new products and services:

“Slash your power bills by 80%!”

“Build your own professional wind and solar power system for less than \$200!”

“Save up to 25% on your monthly electric bills with a surge protector!”

“Paint additive improves home insulation ... blocks heat loss by over 20%.”

“Save up to 50% on your heating bill!”

Sound like hogwash? Could be “greenwash,” a term used to describe inflated or misleading claims about environmental and energy-saving performance. Greenwashing is a growing concern in the home construction industry, driven by consumer interest in energy efficiency and fueled by federal stimulus funding and other incentives for businesses that generate green jobs. It has led to unrealistic expectations on energy and cost savings and is hurting the legitimate energy-efficiency market.

Many credible products and proven technologies are available to help homeowners save significant energy and money. Minnesota Power has promoted energy-efficient home construction for more than 20 years, educating builders through the Triple E New Construction program and the annual Energy Design Conference & Expo. In recognition of its efforts to promote energy-efficient construction and environmental protection, Minnesota Power was honored with an ENERGY STAR® Leadership in Housing Award in 2009.

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February 22-24, 2010

Duluth Entertainment Convention Center

Register at www.duluthenergydesign.com

Early-bird pricing ends February 9, 2010.



Mark LaLiberte

Learn the latest innovations in high performance building, sustainable design and development, and other current energy and environmental topics.

Special 20th Anniversary Events


- Keynote/Dinner—Mark LaLiberte (Tues., Feb. 23)
“The Quarter Century Perspective: A Lighter Glance at this Evolving Industry”
Separate \$25 fee—space limited
- Alternative Transportation Exhibits
- Evening Receptions and Door Prizes
- An Innovative and Exciting Agenda

continued Home construction professionals who understand energy-efficiency and building science can help their customers avoid scams and costly mistakes. Thorough research is prudent before making any energy-saving investment, but certain products and services, such as those listed below, are notorious for overstated energy-saving benefits:

- **“Do-it-yourself” or “build-your-own” renewable energy systems (solar or wind)** Read the fine print and be cautious of cost- and energy-savings promises that seem too good to be true. Output claims for wind systems may assume round-the-clock operation at top capacity, defying the laws of nature and physics. Remember, homeowners who hope to sell excess renewable energy back to the power company must use certified equipment that synchs with the electric grid.
- **Quartz infrared portable electric space heaters** Heating cost savings may be inflated or depend on unique circumstances; expensive features, such as ceramic quartz tubes, do not change the amount of heat produced or the cost of operation. Wattage is the key.
- **Surge protection equipment (transient voltage surge suppressors)** These products protect equipment from power surges, but don't save measurable amounts of energy because spikes last only fractions of a second.
- **Radiant barriers and reflective insulation material** R-value (insulation) claims sometimes are exaggerated by three or four times. Installing these products in an attic may be effective in warm climates but has little impact on heating and cooling loads in our cold northern region. Also, avoid installing them under slabs, since at least one reflective surface must face an air space to operate properly.
- **Insulating paint** R-value claims may not be substantiated by research and science.

In general, be wary of unrealistic claims related to R-value, HVAC efficiency, and emission-free or carbon-neutral technology. Fuel cost comparisons also can be misleading because price changes vary in frequency and amount. Look at two- to five-year averages and added fees for true comparisons.

The 20th Annual Energy Design Conference & Expo is an excellent resource for current, credible information about energy-related issues and high performance housing. A team of energy experts reviews presenters, exhibitors and products to ensure high standards.

Last year's session on “Avoiding Dubious Energy Investments,” by Terry Webster of the Minnesota Office of Energy Security, provided tools to evaluate energy-saving products and services and calculate whether claims make sense. Materials from that presentation and other past sessions are online at www.duluthenergydesign.com. This year's agenda also is available. 

Contact Information



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Put Energy Into Research to Avoid Bogus Products

Internet search engines usually list paid advertisers first, so you may have to dig two or three pages into search results to find independent research and credible data on energy-related products. Here are a few quality sites:

www.energystar.gov
www.energy.mn.gov
www.greenbuildingadvisor.com

If you have concerns about product claims, contact the Minnesota Better Business Bureau or the Federal Trade Commission.

Featured Incentives

EDUCATE YOUR CUSTOMERS ABOUT MINNESOTA POWER'S CONSERVATION INCENTIVES.

High Efficiency Furnace with *Electronically Commutated Motor* \$200 rebate through Dec. 31, 2010.

Drain Water Heat Recovery (DWHR) \$400 rebate through Dec. 31, 2010 for Minnesota Power customers who heat their water with electricity for installation of DWHR systems by trained installer. Bonus of \$50 through Feb. 28, 2010.

Air Source Heat Pump \$300 rebate for furnace-integrated systems (ductwork) and \$500 rebate for mini-split ductless systems, installed by program-trained contractor. Electricity must be a primary heat source. Through Dec. 31, 2010.

Your Home Energy Report Free, customized report detailing how energy is used in your home and ways to begin saving. Go to www.mnpower.com/homeenergyreport.



Visit www.mnpower.com/actionplan for more tools to help your customers make energy-saving investments.