

Building your business
on energy efficiency



Building Up

October 2007

Grow Your Business

with the Right Tools

If you are like many homebuilders and housing contractors in our region, the slowing market has you shifting from new construction to remodeling and home improvement work. One way to distinguish your company is to specialize in projects that improve energy efficiency and home performance.

Almost every existing home could benefit from energy-saving upgrades, ranging from low cost/no cost improvements to major systemic overhauls. A good first step to help your customers identify and prioritize energy-saving opportunities is a basic home energy audit. Minnesota Power and other utilities offer this walk-through service free to residential and commercial customers.

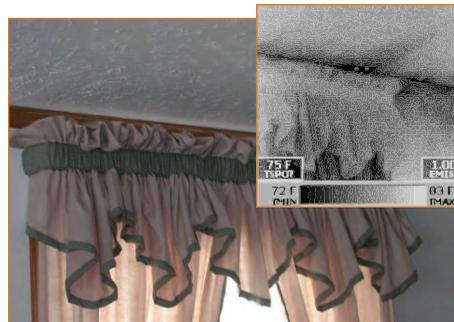
Of course, not all home performance problems or solutions are clearly visible. Sometimes it takes a professional building specialist with unique diagnostic tools to find and correct the underlying causes of complex concerns. This generally is not part of a basic home energy audit.

Providing or connecting your customers to home energy auditing and home diagnostic services can help you make homes more energy efficient, improve customer satisfaction and sell more services. With the growing trend toward sustainable “green” home construction, the climate is right to build your business on energy efficiency.



DEAN

Dean Talbott
Residential
Program Manager



Two common tools in house diagnostics are infrared cameras and blower doors. (Top) Infrared thermal images show surface temperature variations that may indicate air leakage paths (bypasses), inadequate insulation, or moisture in building materials. (Bottom) Blower doors test the air leakage rate of a building. *Photo courtesy TEC.*

Energy conservation is a popular topic these days. Rising fuel prices and growing environmental concerns have many people looking for ways to lower their energy use and reduce their impact on the planet. Remodeling or upgrades that improve the energy efficiency and overall performance of their homes is a great place to start.

Many existing houses, particularly older ones, were not designed or built to be energy efficient. Drafty rooms, hot or cold areas, window condensation, peeling paint, ice dams, mold and high heating bills are common symptoms of poor energy performance. However, the underlying causes can be quite complex—and the solutions more than what meets the eye.

House diagnostics can determine how systems in a house are working—and working together. Before beginning any major home

improvement project or equipment upgrade, it is wise to invest in house diagnostics, using tools such as blower doors and infrared cameras. These tools can measure a home's tightness, locate duct leaks, identify missing or improperly installed insulation, assess combustion efficiency and safety, and check for proper ventilation so you can recommend the best course of action and help your customers make informed decisions. If your company does not perform these tests, there are building specialists in our region trained to provide house diagnostic services.

Minnesota Power is piloting an enhanced home energy audit program, called “Home Performance,” that will evaluate existing homes using state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment and recommend comprehensive energy improvements. It also will provide customers with tools to monitor electric appliances and track real-time electrical energy consumption. A full “Home Performance”

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program may be launched as early as 2008. New sessions on house diagnostics and building science will be included in the 18th Annual Energy Design Conference and Expo, February 26-27, at the DECC in Duluth. Pre-conference workshops begin February 25.

Homeowners appreciate contractors who provide intelligent answers, cost-effective solutions, and quality services. Whether you are contacted for window replacement, air sealing, insulation, furnace replacement or any number of other reasons, understanding how components of a house work as a system and applying the principles of building science to every project is good business. It will give you a competitive edge in the green and energy-efficient remodeling market—and may put more “green” in your pocket, as well.

Mark Your Calendars

18th Annual Energy Design Conference & Expo

Feb. 26-27, 2008, DECC, Duluth

*****New in 2008*****

Pre-conference workshops
Monday, February 25

Register now at

www.duluthenergydesign.com

Contact Information



30 West Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802-2093
Toll-Free 800-228-4966
218-722-2641
www.mnpower.com

Check out past issues of *Building Up* online at
mnpower.com/triplestar/buildingup.htm

Recent topics include the Eco-Home at Hawk Ridge; ENERGY STAR®-qualified lighting; energy-efficient HVAC; customer testimonials; and more.



Featured Tools & Incentives

Home energy improvements may qualify for low interest financing, utility rebates or federal tax credits. Here are some key resources to help determine if your project meets the criteria.

FEDERAL TAX CREDITS

ENERGY STAR® (www.energystar.gov) offers detailed information to improve home energy efficiency and performance. There are federal tax credits available for many home improvements and builder incentives for homes constructed to ENERGY STAR® standards.

LOW INTEREST FINANCING

The Neighborhood Energy Connection (www.theNEC.org) promotes residential energy improvements by providing low interest financing to homeowners. Two statewide loan programs currently are available:

- **Fix Up Fund** (funded by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency)—Flexible financing for general home improvements.
- **Minnesota Energy Loan** (an initiative of the Minnesota Fix Up Fund)—Specifically designed to encourage energy efficiency, this financing program includes a home energy audit, energy improvement recommendations and optional follow-up inspections.

UTILITY REBATES

Minnesota Power (www.mnpower.com/foundmoney) offers rebates for many residential conservation improvements:

- ENERGY STAR® lighting and appliances
- Triple E/ENERGY STAR® New Construction
- Ground-source heat systems
- Renewable energy

For more information and current incentives, visit
www.mnpower.com/triplestar

“It’s like finding money.”