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Be a green homebuyer and remember to ask the right questions

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Home shoppers around the country are visiting homes for sale looking for the perfect one for their family. Construction of new homes is down, which means more of these buyers will be looking at existing homes. Existing homes, particularly older homes built before current energy codes, are less likely to have as many energy efficiency features as newly-constructed homes, so it's important that home shoppers ask the right questions to find the perfect "green home" for their family. But what makes a "green home" and how do you find one? It isn't looking for granite countertops or stainless steel appliances; it's looking for the invisible - the efficiency. Energy-efficient homes cost less to own than non-efficient homes as a result of saving on utility bills, and often provide a more comfortable and healthy living space.

Asking the right questions is the first step to finding the perfect green home for you and your family. Here are some key house-hunting questions:

- * What is the R-value of the attic insulation? (The higher the R-value, the more insulated the home).
- * Is there any insulation in the walls? (many old homes have NO wall insulation).
- * Are the windows double-paned? Are they low-e coated or Energy Star rated?
- * What is the U-factor of the windows? (The U-factor, listed on the National Fenestration Council label, reflects the insulation ability of the entire window, not just the glass. Look for a U-factor of 0.35 or lower.
- * What is the SEER rating on the air conditioner? How old is it? (If the AC was well-sized for your prospective home, the higher the SEER, the more efficient. The current standard is SEER-13).
- * Has the home had an energy audit? A HERS rating?
- * What are the utility bills?

To help realtors answer these questions, the National Home Performance Council (NHPC) released a study last year entitled *Unlocking the Full Value of Green homes: Why Green Multiple Listing Services are a Key to Residential Energy Efficiency* that encourages states and stakeholders to revise Multiple Listing Services (MLS), which compile information on for-sale homes, to include clean energy criteria. This effort, says NHPC, is an important step toward ensuring homes with energy efficiency and renewable energy components are valued properly.

"It is hard to be a Green homebuyer," said Kara Saul Rinaldi, executive director of the NHPC. "While we can see solar panels, the vital energy efficiency information about a home is often hidden behind walls, in ducts, or behind dusty systems. The key is to know what you are looking for and ask the right questions so your realtor can find out the answers that will help you make a smart energy choice."

Since the release of the report, NHPC has been leading efforts to make it easier for homeowners and homebuyers to find value in an energy efficient home. NHPC has been working with states,

standards and organization operators, realtors, and others to develop a set of standardized data elements for a Home Performance Energy Upgrade Certificate, which would detail the energy efficiency features of a home and could be easily integrated into an MLS system and used by realtors.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the typical U.S. family spends about \$1,900 a year on home utility bills. Unfortunately, a large portion of that energy is wasted, and each year, electricity generated by fossil fuels for a single home puts more carbon dioxide into the air than two average cars. Look for the most energy efficiency home, and save money while being good to the planet.

To download the report and learn more about the importance of residential energy efficiency, go to www.nhpci.org.

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