



**Dear Colleen,**

I want to buy an energy efficient home for me and my family. But all the homes we have seen that have any kind of green features listed have been 2 million dollars or more! What can the average family do to buy a green home?

Thanks for your help,

“Looking”

**Dear Looking,**

I understand what you are going thru. It seems that only the high end architectural homes are boasting green features. But do not give up. There are so many things you can do to “green” your new moderate priced home for the same price as a traditional mid- range remodel. The only difference is that going green is so satisfying; you’ll want to do more and more.

Once the energy savings starts, you will be excited to see what else you can do to cut down those monthly bills. And once the air in the house gets purified, you will never put PVC materials in your home again. You will be able to smell the petroleum like you never did before. And on and on it goes till you become... an environmentalist.....oh no!!!

Okay maybe not you, but really, superior air quality and energy savings is addictive and a huge benefit to you, your family and the future resale of your home.

So what can you do.? First, get an Ecobroker as your Realtor. This is more than a plug it is a great piece of advice. An Ecobroker will look at a home on the market and see it as a “Future” green home, or not. There are some features that can be “greened” and some you have to live with. And it is the parts you have to live with that you better know about before you buy.

One thing you cannot change is your houses orientation to the sun. Does your potential house face south? A South facing home can use the sun as a natural heating and lighting source. If it is not facing south, think about it, how can you get that southern light and warmth into your home? Are there windows on the south wall? Are there trees blocking the sunlight? Perhaps you can put solar panels on the roof? Is that what you were thinking?

Yes you can, but before you would want to do that, you need to make sure you have done all the energy saving work inside the house to minimize the amount of energy those solar panels will need to generate. So before you go for the panels, go back to basics.

The very first energy saving remodel you want to do in a house is to insulate, caulk, seal and plug. Make sure you are not letting your hot and cold air escape through a recessed light fixture, a wall socket, a window or a door frame.

Next, check the efficiency of your current HVAC with a professional. Two reasons for this are; one: you may be using more energy than is necessary for the size of the home and two; you want to make sure there are no gas fumes leaking into the interior of the home.

The old adage, more is better, is not the case here. Many systems were put into homes that are just too big and really not necessary. These hulks are causing your energy bills to be higher than they need to be. Your over kill unit could really be too much once you insulate, caulk, seal and plug up your home. Those upgrades can trim the amount of horse power you need enough to retire that old mare.

When it comes to gas heaters, keep the gas in the heater. Check the seals around your unit. When gas escapes no matter where the unit is located in the house, the pressure from the house can suck it up into the interior rooms of the house through the vents. That is known as a Sick home, and it sucks. You can usually smell it. You know that smell you thought was supposed to be there when you turned the heater on. Yeah, no, you don't want it. Keep the gas in the pump and don't let it escape into the ducts and rooms. You think that is obvious, but you would be surprised how many old furnaces and heaters are sending bad gas into our homes. It is an easy fix, or replacement and well worth the health benefits.

Last in this list is to clean and wrap the duct work. Make sure there are no leaks. You want to keep all that good energy in the home and not in the ceiling or the walls.

**If all this seems daunting, expensive, and unsexy wait, I have good news.**

There is an energy efficient upgrade loan program. This loan program is designed to help home buyers get extra money at the time of purchase to do some basic energy saving upgrades without having to include it in the price of the house! That let's you save your money for the bamboo floors and the Caesar stone counter tops.

Chatting with the folk at Modern Earth Finance, I learned that these Energy Efficient Mortgages, called EEM's, are available to give up to \$8000.00 to the borrower on top of their loan for their home. This money is earmarked to just do energy saving up grades. The real helpful part is that the home owner does not have to qualify for that extra money, nor do they have to increase the amount of their down payment to get this money. It is all based on an independent test or rating by a HERS (yes you have to pay for it) Rater. They generate a report that tells the lender how much savings these upgrades will yield. If the savings are more than the cost of the upgrade, you get the money. It is kept in escrow while the work is done and then paid out once all upgrades have been independently verified.

But wait, there's more. Current legislation is in the works to increase that amount to 5% of the homes total purchase price. Now were talking. In Venice, that could mean a good chunk of change to get your house energized! With that money we could upgrade windows and water heaters and more of the sexy stuff. But I am getting carried away.

So you see the potential to go green is with any home on the market... It is a very exciting time and I am very excited to help you get involved. Whether you are buying a new home or renovating your current one, adding green systems and materials to

your home will not only benefit you now but in the future. Energy efficient, water conserving healthy homes will be the homes future homebuyers will be looking for.

I look forward to talking to you again

Colleen McLean –HomeGirl - Eco Realtor

