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Future Energy Climate Looks Brighter For Those Who Build Renewable Ready Homes

MADISON, Wis. — An increasing number of people are considering rising energy costs, energy independence and the environment when building a new home, however, many don't know what they can do about these concerns. One option gaining attention is solar energy, a renewable energy option that uses the sun's energy to heat hot water and generate electricity. While incorporating solar energy into a new home may seem daunting to many homeowners, the Wisconsin ENERGY STAR® Homes Program can work with their builder to make their home ready for future renewable energy installations should they want to take the next step toward energy independence.

“As the cost of energy increases and renewable energy systems become more affordable, more people are recognizing the many benefits of incorporating renewable energy into their homes,” said Greg Nahn, program manager for the Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes Program. “Incorporating renewable ready details into the planning and construction of a home is relatively easy and inexpensive. It makes sense to prepare your home now for an easier transition in the future — should you choose to make one.”

Take Full Advantage of Energy Savings

The first step for individuals looking to build a home ready for the energy climate today and in the future is to find a builder who participates in the Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes Program. Builders who participate in the program combine custom design with materials and building techniques proven to ensure a high level of performance and energy efficiency. They also pay special attention to air tightness, ventilation capacity and combustion safety. The result is a safe, durable, comfortable and energy efficient home.

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A certified Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Home is one that is designed, built and performance tested to ensure it exceeds nationally recognized and proven building performance standards. As a result, a Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Home is estimated to be 25 percent more energy efficient than a home built to Wisconsin's Uniform Dwelling Code. Moreover, as energy costs continue to rise, a Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Home becomes even more cost effective. The savings begin the month the homeowner moves in and can add up to significant savings over the years. Through the program, the homeowner may choose to take their savings potential one step further by building it ready for renewable energy.

Additional Advantages

In addition to offering the homeowner a defense against rising energy costs, a renewable ready home:

- Simplifies the future implementation of solar electric and solar hot water heating systems
- Avoids the costs of retrofitting pipes and wiring to prepare for renewable energy system requirements
- Includes site verification to determine pre-qualification of your lot and plans for solar access and future system requirements
- Creates interest for future buyers and increases the resale value of your home
- Increases the marketability of the home as energy prices rise
- Includes a report providing more information on how to take the next step in energy savings by adding a renewable energy system to the home

There are also financial incentives for homeowners to install renewable energy systems. Focus on Energy's Renewable Energy Program currently offers Cash-Back Rewards and grants on a first-come, first-serve basis to Wisconsin residents for a variety of renewable energy systems, including solar hot water and solar electric systems. In addition to these incentives, on January 1, 2006, new federal tax credits were made available, making renewable energy systems more attainable than ever. Wisconsin homeowners can take advantage of the new 30 percent federal tax credit (up to \$2,000) between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2007 when they install a qualifying solar domestic hot water or solar electric system.

Big Picture Benefits

“Wisconsin doesn’t have the coal mines, natural gas reserves or oil fields needed to generate its own electricity and heat. However, it does have the capacity to use renewable energy sources — such as the sun,” said Nahn. “By tapping energy from the sun, homeowners are fostering economic growth by reducing the amount of money leaving the state to purchase fuel and keeping that money in Wisconsin’s economy. In addition, they are helping to protect Wisconsin’s air and water for future generations.”

A Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Home constructed to be renewable ready not only benefits Wisconsin’s economy, it helps to lower the cost of living while improving the quality of life for the people who own it. For more information about renewable energy and the Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes Program, including the names of builder partners, visit focusonenergy.com or call 800.762.7077.

About Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes

Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes is one of the Focus on Energy Residential Programs. New homes are constructed to meet program standards and are estimated to be more than 25 percent more energy efficient than homes built to Wisconsin’s Uniform Dwelling Code. To date, the more than 350 builders who have partnered with the Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes Program have constructed over 6,000 new homes. For information about the program, call 800.762.7077 or visit focusonenergy.com.

About Focus on Energy

Focus on Energy is a public-private partnership offering energy information and services to energy utility customers throughout Wisconsin. The goals of this program are to encourage energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, enhance the environment and ensure the future supply of energy for Wisconsin. Since July 2001, the program has helped Wisconsin’s businesses and residents cut their annual utility bills by more than \$98 million – reducing their energy consumption by more than 811 million kilowatt-hours and more than 40 million therms of natural gas. For more information, call 800.762.7077 or visit focusonenergy.com.

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