

Home tour participants also get a peek at energy scores

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Perhaps in the future, checking the energy efficiency of a new home will be as easy as reading the gas mileage sticker for a new car.

For people on the Lane County Home Builders Association 2011 Tour of Homes, the future is now.

Nine of the 16 homes on the tour — which starts today — feature a score for the energy efficiency of the home's insulation, air leakage, heating and cooling systems, major appliances, lighting and water heating.

The 26th annual home tour, organized by the builders group, features new homes by builders throughout the Eugene-Springfield area.

Some of those builders teamed up with Energy Trust of Oregon, a nonprofit energy-conservation organization, to create "energy performance scores" for their homes. The score is for a new home's expected energy use, "greenhouse gas" impact and monthly utility costs.

"Builders offering (the energy score) for their homes are leading the way to promote more energy-efficient new home construction," said Matt Braman, a residential manager with Energy Trust. "They are also doing their part in encouraging home buyers to consider a home's energy consumption as part of their buying decision."

The score includes a number for energy consumption and one for carbon or "greenhouse gas" emissions. The numbers appear on a scale that also includes what the home's score would be if built simply to Oregon code standards and the average score for Oregon homes.

Energy Trust is providing the scores for homes that heat either the structure or the water with fuel from one of their partners, Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural and Cascade Natural Gas. Customers of those utilities pay a percentage of their bills toward energy efficiency programs.

Eugene Water & Electric Board is also teaming up with the Energy Trust to include the energy score on a handful of new homes served by the utility, including eight on the tour, EWEB spokesman Lance Robertson said.

Builders choose to work with Energy Trust on an energy-efficient home. The home is then inspected during construction and assigned a numerical score, with zero energy consumption being the goal, Energy Trust said.

"Eugene builder Jordan Iverson, who is showcasing two homes with the energy score, said it can be more expensive to build "green" — an energy-efficient water heater, for example, can cost four times as much as a traditional model, he added.

"The people that see (energy-efficient characteristics) really appreciate it in the long run," he said. "I'm not really getting (the additional cost) back, but I know the homeowner finds value in it."

The home buyer can get the score from the builder, or through a real estate agent working with the builder. All tour homes will have their scores on display, and copies of the scores will be available, said Lisa Scholin, a tour spokeswoman."