

Green, green, green!

DEAR MR. ENERGY,

Everyone talks about being more "green." Green, green, green. It gets a little overwhelming sometimes. I try to buy organic food for my family and carpool when I can, but should I be doing things to my home (besides avoiding toxic cleaners and the like) to be more "green?"

—Chartreuse in Carrboro

DEAR CHARTREUSE,

Mr. Energy commends you on trying to feed your family in a non-toxic way, sharing rides, and saving the planet in the bargain, but he's here to tell you that the single most impactful thing that you can do to cut down on your energy consumption is ... weatherize your home.

That's right. Insulation, weatherstripping, and caulking the heck out of any leaks in your home impacts your carbon footprint more than anything else you can do in your life. More than eating organic and local (though Mr. Energy thinks that's wonderful and important), more than switching conventional lightbulbs to CFLs (a great idea, by the way, which will more than pay for itself over time), and more than buying a hybrid vehicle. That's right. Mr. Energy said it: weatherizing your home is a bigger deal and has greater impact than driving a Prius, and at less than a tenth of the price.

Fact: The biggest contributor to the average American's carbon footprint (the amount of greenhouse gases an individual will use over his/her lifetime) is heating or cooling that person's home.

Next fact: By cutting the amount of energy it takes to heat a person's home, one can snip a significant portion of one's carbon footprint.

Final fact: The most cost-effective way to cut down on the heating and cooling of a home is to weatherize that home so it's as tight as it can be. The best way to form a plan of action for weatherizing? A home energy audit.

Other ways you can cut down on the costs of heating/cooling your home? Alternative energy sources, like solar and wind power, will slash your carbon footprint. Only problem with these is that they're expensive and the return on the investment for solar or wind is a long, long time.

The return on weatherization is only a couple of years. And after that, the money saved is money in your pocket.

ASK Mr. Energy



Plus you've cut off the little toe of your carbon footprint, which means you're more

"green." Green, green, green.

DEAR MR. ENERGY,

I know all about the federal tax credits for energy efficiency, but what rebates are available for home weatherization projects in the Triangle area? I have to do something about my heating bills, but it'd be great if I could get a little money back in my pocket sooner than next year's tax bill, if you know what I mean.

—A Bargain Hunter in Carrboro

DEAR BARGAIN HUNTER,

I know exactly what you mean. Mr. Energy loves a good bargain! The great news is that there are several rebates available for home weatherization projects in the Triangle. And Mr. Energy is willing to bet that several more are coming down the pike.

The first and best rebate for home owners who want to make their homes more energy-efficient is the one being offered through Progress Energy Carolinas. Customer rebates cover duct testing and sealing, attic sealing and insulation, HVAC system replacement, as well as window replacement. The reason I think this is the best program is that while several other local energy providers are offering things like rebates for appliances and HVAC system upgrades, Progress Energy's rebates apply to far more of their customers than those offered by other companies. Their duct testing rebate can be applied towards a professional energy audit and their emphasis on duct repair, attic sealing, and attic insulation are things that most homeowners can use. You may not need a new HVAC system (and you may not have the money to replace your current one) but almost every homeowner needs their ducts tested and repaired.

If you get an energy audit (with a duct testing rebate, remember) you will also know if you need your attic sealed and insulated (another rebate) And please – do us a favor – do what

Progress Energy recommends and seal your attic before adding more insulation. An unsealed attic with extra insulation is like pouring more water into a leaky cup.

If you go to their Progress Energy's website and look for "Home Energy Improvement Program" you'll see all the details of their program as well as a list of approved contractors.

If you don't have Progress Energy, other local energy companies that are offering rebates are Duke Energy's \$martSaver program, which gives rebates for the purchase of high efficiency heat pumps, AC units, or Geothermal heat pumps. PSNC, a natural gas company, is offering rebates on energy-efficient water heaters. Several other companies are offering rebates for solar hot water, Energy Star appliances, credits for Energy Star homes, as well as a plethora of energy-efficiency loan programs.

The best place to look for credits and rebates beyond those I've listed is here: <http://www.dsireusa.org>. This lists all the tax credits and rebates available for all areas of energy efficiency by state.

"Mr. Energy" is the collaborative effort of Mark and Adrienne Bashista, co-owners of Home Performance NC, an energy audit and weatherization contractor serving the greater Triangle area. Contact them at 919.360.1570 and see their website at www.homeperformancenc.com

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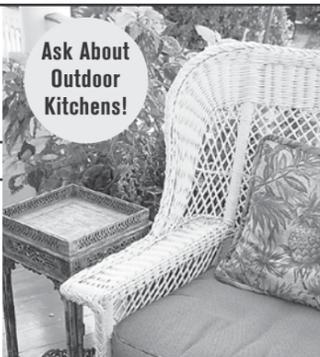


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