

Going Green: Doing Our Part

What is the bigger producer of green house emissions? It may surprise you that it is not cars but homes. With the nexus of real estate transactions and the green movement being homes, it makes sense for REALTORS® to get involved in helping California consumers make more sustainable choices in the office and home setting.

According to the Wall Street Journal, “American businesses could save \$1.72 billion each year merely by getting employees to shut off their computers at night or allowing the machines to enter an energy-saving mode.” However, there is so much more than we can all do besides turning off our computers at night.

When the Yosemite Gateway Association of REALTORS® built their new building in 2004 and 2005, it was important to incorporate items considered green into and around the structure. We installed motion sensors throughout the building; thus, our lights turn off if motion is not detected within a certain pre-set period of time. Our heating and cooling system is zoned for efficiency when areas are not in use. We have low-watt fluorescents and CFL light bulbs. We incorporated low-flow water fixtures in our bathroom and into our exterior water features. Our landscaping irrigation is on timers and programmed according to the water company schedule for conservation and our plants are low-water tolerant. In addition, the parking lot lights are on timers and settings adjusted monthly.

The California Association of REALTORS® (C.A.R.) is also doing its part to become a more environmentally friendly organization and is leading the way toward a greener world. One of the things that C.A.R. has done to assist with this effort was to create a green website with the goal to provide information to homeowners, REALTORS®, and the general public on how to green their living spaces. The website is <http://green.car.org>.

The C.A.R. green website has many helpful features. One feature goes over the most common ***misconceptions*** about green homes, such as, green homes are more expensive; anything that claims to be green is green; a new home is always a green home; green homes look unconventional, and; green homes are uncomfortable.

There is also a section on water conservation. Did you know that using less hot water can save you money? Water heating accounts for about 13 percent of home energy costs. Also, reducing water usage reduces energy usage.

Resource conservation, which refers to the usage of renewable and eco-friendly materials in building and construction as well as reducing waste and recycling products, can also save the environment by reducing waste during construction. An average 2,000 square foot home produces about 7,000 pounds of waste.

Improved air quality is also important. The air in homes can be 10 times more polluted than outdoor air from contaminants such as mold and bacteria, chemicals, allergens, etc. Much of the indoor pollution that exists in homes stems from materials in the house. Pressed-wood is often made with adhesives that release chemicals in homes for years after installation. Also, many paints, floor finishes, and sealants emit unhealthy volatile organic compounds.

At home, the electricity load is increasing due to the use of miscellaneous electronic devices such as television (TV) converter boxes (cable, satellite, and other) and other devices such as VCR's, DVD players/recorders, stereos, computers, printers, fax and copy machines, toasters, and coffee makers. These devices can draw as much power when they are turned off as when they are turned on. In fact, one converter box consumes about half the electricity of a new Energy Star refrigerator. In my household, we have six converter boxes. However, using a power strip helps. Power strips make it easy to cut off the power to your devices by easily flipping the switch rather than unplugging each individual device. Just be sure to get a power strip that is designed and rated for the devices you plan to plug into it. Power strips are also good for plug-in loads for items such as mobile phones, blue-tooth devices, portable music devices, and more.

Other ways to reduce green house emissions in your home or office is to buy all-in-one models (for example, a printer, copier, fax, and scanner) and Energy Star equipment. Energy Star estimates that swapping to a new, efficient refrigerator would save enough money to light the average household for nearly four months with an overall payback of about three years. Using natural resources for energy such as solar and wind is also helpful.

It's important to note that newer doesn't always mean more energy efficient. For example, plasma-screen and LCD TV's use significantly more energy than older tube sets. However, today's more efficient refrigerators use half the power of refrigerators made before 1993. Replacing old computers with new computers is also helpful in reducing energy.

I challenge you to set a goal to do what you can to make your office and home more green prior to Earth Day, which is coming up in about two months on April 22. Share with others what you are personally doing to reduce green house emissions and encourage others to join you in doing their part. Together, we can make a difference.

Beverly Scott, President

Yosemite Gateway Association of REALTORS®

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