



Alternative Energy Resources Organization
432 N. Last Chance Gulch
Helena, MT 59601

Energy Considerations for First-time Home Buyers

- 1. Introduction: Why is efficiency important when buying a home?** Affordability, energy efficiency mortgages, self-sufficiency and ability to your manage mortgages, comfort, quiet, quality, resale value
- 2. What to Look for in a Prospective Home** (or as part of your inspection process once it's under contract)
 - a. **Home Ratings:** Energy star or "green" built homes
 - b. Request to see **past utility bills** and ask whether the home vacant or occupied. Remember that energy consumption will vary widely based on lifestyle and number of occupants.
 - c. Ask about **past energy audits**. An audit will include a blower door test (to measure leakiness/tightness) and recommendations for cost effective improvements
 - i. The seller, even if they weren't the one who had the audit performed, can request a copy of the report for your review. If you have questions about the report, call KEMA directly ((800) 823-5995) and someone there will be happy to run through it with you.
 - ii. If there hasn't been an audit performed, you may consider asking for one, either from NorthWestern Energy if there's time (free), or from a certified HERS inspector (fee)
 - d. During your **home inspection**, plan to do extensive research on things that are important to you. Pay consideration to:
 - i. **Insulation:** The savings vary widely depending upon how much insulation you already have. Typical savings for retrofit insulation are on the order of 20-30% of your actual heating consumption.
 - ii. **Appliances and HVAC System:** Look for Energy Star ratings. Upgraded heating and air conditioning systems, water heaters, refrigerators
 - iii. Type of heating fuel – gas vs. electric (heating systems and DHW – domestic hot water)
 1. Gas – **significantly less cost per heat unit** (about ½ of electric per therm)
 2. Electric- **High cost per heat unit** (double the cost of natural gas)
- 3. Cheap and easy fixes in the meantime** (for your current home or rental)
 - a. **Insulate your water heater**
 - b. Replace incandescent light bulbs with **CFLs**.
 - c. **Program your thermostat**
 - d. Set your refrigerator to the right temperature: between 38 and 42 degrees F for the refrigerator and 0 to 5 degrees F for the freezer.
 - e. **Wash clothes in cold water:** and always do full loads.
 - f. Adjust **hot water** temperature to 120 degrees.
- 4. Conclusion:**
 - a. Take advantage of incentives and rebates: Check with NWE: visit northwesternenergy.com or call John Campbell (406) 497-3364
 - b. Talk with an accountant or visit www.dsireusa.org to find out about tax credits for energy efficiency improvements.
 - c. Keep your bills low! As first time buyers, remind yourself that most likely this will not be your last home. So, purchase this home and make improvements accordingly, knowing that someday you might be trying to talk someone else into buying it!