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IBS ADVISORS

INTEGRATED BUILDING SCIENCE

June 22, 2010

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DOE is Proposing to Reinvent the Wheel

Brett,

The Department of Energy is proposing a new rating system for existing homes. They intend to use this voluntary system to help implement retrofit energy measures. They are also working with HUD and FHA to help the mortgage markets address the issues of financing energy efficiency improvements. I have **proposed** a low-cost solution that would have a dramatic positive impact on both residential energy efficiency and the mortgage markets.

Unfortunately, they are trying to reinvent the wheel, basing this new program on the assumption that the RESNET Home Energy Rating System is strictly for new homes. This underlying assumption is completely false. I cannot find anywhere in the RESNET Standards where it declares that the Standards are only for new homes. In fact, it only mentions "homes".

They want a system that provides a label for the home that is meaningful to the home buyer/owner, but doesn't stigmatize homes that are energy hogs. They also want to use a national average energy price and national average cost of improvements. This is pretty much a waste of time and money. Energy hog homes should be stigmatized (remember the Hummer?) so that the market will force them to undergo repairs and improvements. Using national averages for energy savings and costs of improvements won't produce an accurate assessment and recommendations. If I'm paying 6 cents per kilowatt hour of electricity, there aren't a lot of options that are cost effective based upon savings. If I'm paying 19 cents per kilowatt hour, more options become viable. The whole concept is flawed.

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Home Star Update!

There are some concerns that due to the huge national deficit, Home Star legislation won't pass through the Senate. Currently in the Finance Committee, more national organizations are joining the effort supporting the passage of this bill. The latest industry group is the National Association of Manufacturers, asking for the Senate to pass this bill to help stimulate economic growth in the manufacturing sector for energy efficient materials.

They want a label that will graphically illustrate to the consumer where this home stands compared to a national benchmark. The options they are looking at now are vertical (like a thermometer). They want input from focus groups to help determine what that should look like. Once again, they are duplicating work that the Building America program has already done. A couple of years ago, the DoE Building America program released the Builders Challenge, using the EnergySmart Home scale, a horizontal version of the HERS Index. This horizontal graphic was developed after... you guessed it, input from focus groups!

This reminds me of the time I was at a DOE ENERGY STAR(R) conference held in Savannah, GA. As I was sitting around the table with the DOE and the Energy Officers from that region and their staff, someone came up with a brilliant idea. "We need marketing material that is consumer oriented and explains clearly why people should buy ENERGY STAR homes!"

This idea caught on, and soon everyone was talking about the types of media pieces they would need, the fact that these pieces should also address the growing Hispanic population, the delivery method and the costs to produce and who would bear those costs.

I finally couldn't stand it any longer and raised my hand. "I don't know why you are not aware of this, but there is a website that you can go to that already provides all of these pieces for consumers at no charge. In fact, if you join this particular program, they will mail you all of the brochures you want in English and Spanish... for free!" The room went quiet. "That's right. Absolutely free. All you need to do is go to www.energystar.gov and sign up as a partner (for free) and then place orders for as much material as you like. This site has been up and running for the EPA for a while now."

You could have heard a pin drop in the room as it dawned on them that they were trying to reinvent the wheel.

There already is a national rating system in place, driven by market forces, that produces labels, certificates, improvement analysis reports, has a built in quality assurance process and training delivery system. It's called the Home Energy Rating System (HERS(R)), and it's been around for quite a while. To become a HERS Rater, you must attend a peer-reviewed training program accredited by RESNET, demonstrate proficiency with diagnostic and performance testing equipment, and software analysis based upon a thorough assessment of the home.

What our students say:

"Great instructor, really helped me understand some energy efficiency concepts that were unknown to me because I had no background or experience on the subject." Lina L.

"I think the instructor knows his subject matter extremely well, and is able to pass along his know-how in an interesting manner." Donna E.

"Very in depth and effective. Great training!" -Todd K.

Builders Tax Credit Update

The legislation extending the builder's tax credit for building energy efficient homes to December 31, 2010 has been held up in the Senate due to a threatened filibuster.

IBS Advisors is offering two courses in July for people interested in becoming HERS Raters. The first is going to be in San Antonio, TX, July 7-9 & 14-16. The second is going to be held on South Padre Island, July 21-23 & 28-30. For more information and to sign up for the course, please click the link below.

[Home Energy Rater Course](#)

Stress, Ego and Decision Making

Stress causes a marked reduction in our ability to make sound decisions through a complicated process involving chemical reactions in our brains, emotional reactions based upon certain fears and a diminished working memory capacity that gives us tunnel vision.

I recently posted a [blog](#) on this, and discussed how I deal with making decisions during stress.

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