

Saturday, September 15, 2007 - 12:00 AM

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

EcoConsumer

We're going great guns for green homes

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Who wouldn't want a healthier, more energy-efficient home?

When buying a new home or remodeling, however, we must balance our eco-wish list with other qualities important to us, such as price, durability, style, amenities and location.

Fortunately, today's green options for homes are often hip and attractive, and can even save money.

Greenest of the green

Here in the Seattle area, home buyers and remodelers place an increasingly high priority on green features. We lead the nation in residential green building, and the Built Green program has blazed the trail by making these homes more available.

Launched in 1999 by the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish counties, Built Green provides consumers with rating systems for green-home construction and remodeling.

Since then, other counties have started their own programs under the umbrella of Built Green Washington. Similar programs exist around the nation.

Builders and the public have embraced the concept. Built Green homes now make up more than 20 percent of new residential construction in King County.

"We have the greatest residential market share on green building in the country," said Patti Southard, of King County's Green Tools Program.

The initial goal was 10,000 Built Green homes in King and Snohomish counties by 2010. But the total already stands at nearly 12,000 homes.

Inside Built Green

Like other certification programs, Built Green involves extensive checklists (www.builtgreen.net/checklists.html). Categories include site and water protection, energy efficiency, health and indoor air quality and materials efficiency.

For new homes, builders score points for more than 400 possible attributes and practices, such as "programmable thermostats," "passive solar design with advanced features," "no carpet," "no polyvinyl chloride (PVC, or vinyl) piping" and "compost used to stabilize disturbed slopes."

Smaller homes receive a bonus, since they have a lower environmental impact.

Homes earn Built Green ratings of one to five stars. Builders self-certify their homes for the first three levels. The four- and five-star levels require third-party verification.

If you want Built Green, consider going all the way, and choose a home with four or five stars. In the Issaquah Highlands planned community, for example, all new homes now carry the four- and five-star designations. Those homes are priced from about \$230,000 to more than \$3 million.

Another Built Green community, High Point in West Seattle, has risen like a green phoenix on the former site of a bleak public-housing project. High Point includes low-income rentals. You can also find other Built Green rental homes across the region, as well as apartments, condos and retirement communities.

Built Green has succeeded because, "It's coming from the builders," Southard said. "Some of the biggest developers in King County are using it. That put it into the mainstream immediately. So right out of the gate, Built Green was affordable and very competitive."

Another strength of the program: Built Green adjusts the criteria frequently to reflect the latest technology, "continually raising the bar," Southard said.

How to find them

With Built Green and the new LEED for Homes (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification program, builders now have an arsenal of practical tools and incentives to incorporate green features into their projects.

And now, a new "green design features" enhancement to the Northwest Multiple Listing Service makes it easier to find green homes, though only listing real-estate agents can currently access it. Introduced in June, the system allows agents to use checkboxes to highlight a home's green features, as well as Built Green or LEED certification. When shopping for a new house or condo, ask your agent to

search this database.

Already one of the brightest stars of the environmental movement, green building just keeps growing. With the one-two punch of healthier conditions for your family and cost savings from energy efficiency, it's only a matter of time before green home construction and remodeling projects become the rule, not the exception.

Tom Watson, project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services, writes the EcoConsumer column for the digs section in Saturday's Times. Reach him at tom.watson@metrokc.gov, 206-296-4481 or www.KCecoconsumer.com.

[Copyright © 2007 The Seattle Times Company](#)