

Improve Your Home's Energy Efficiency with Technology

More and more, home buyers are looking for ways to incorporate home technologies that increase the long-term value of their house but also provide convenience, safety and comfort. These days, energy management tops the list of desired features in new homes, according to a recent survey by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

NAHB's 2007-2008 consumer preferences survey of more than 2,300 recent and prospective home buyers examined the features, products, amenities and layouts preferred in a new home.

In the home technology features category, the number one choice among respondents was energy management at 61 percent – up from 45 percent in 2004. Also ranked highly in this category were multi-zone heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC), lighting controls and home theatres.

Staying in the home technology features category, three of the top five most-wanted technology features – energy management, HVAC and lighting control – also provide energy-efficiency. By incorporating the following technologies, home owners can save money on their utility bills:

- Automated HVAC systems can maintain a more energy-efficient temperature while the home owners are away at work, but switch to a more comfortable temperature prior to their arrival home. Zones can also be created to heat or cool only the areas most used by the occupants, keeping other areas, such as guest bedrooms, shut down until they are needed. According to Energy Star, a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, programmable thermostats can save consumers about \$180 per year in energy costs.
- Water heaters with a timer can be turned off when the occupants are traveling, then can turn on and begin heating the water in preparation for their return home. Tankless gas water heaters – which only activate when residents start to use hot water and immediately

de-activate when they are done – are also a great option and can reduce water heating costs up to 35 percent annually.

- Lighting can make up 10 to 20 percent of the total electrical usage of the home. Installing an automatic dimmer, which adjusts to the homeowner's needs based on time of day or occupancy, will lower electricity bills and increase the life expectancy of light bulbs.
- Blinds and drapes can be programmed to close during the hottest part of the day to block out the sun; keeping the house cooler. In the colder winter months, they can open up to allow the sun in to warm the house, which helps regulate the room temperature.

By incorporating technologies that help make your home operate more efficiently, Energy Star estimates that home owners can save \$200 to \$400 annually on their energy bills.

For more information on these and other home technologies available, visit the National Association of Home Builders online at www.nahb.org/forconsumers.