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Green homes cuts energy costs

By Ana Ley
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4 of 4

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Located at 3303 Highline Trail, this 1,954-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath house is a year old and lists for \$241,469. It is certified by Build San Antonio Green, Energy Star and the U.S. Department of Energy's Builders Challenge. PHOTO COURTESY OF IMAGINE HOMES



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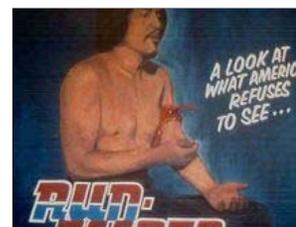
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Jeannie Mosier likes to show off her electricity bills.

Mosier, who moved into a house with green features last June in Coveney Ranch, said her energy cost is less than half compared with others who have comparably sized homes.

"One of the things that I really like about the house is that when you set it at a temperature, it stays there," Mosier said. "There's very little fluctuation."

Mosier's two-story house is 3,800 square feet and has four bedrooms and four bathrooms. The home's green features include foam insulation that regulates indoor

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temperatures, a solar water heater, double-paned windows, a programmable air conditioning system and Energy Star-certified appliances.

She spends as little as \$200 on electricity some months.

John Friesenhahn, a partner with San Antonio-based [Imagine Homes](#), said that moving into a house with green features not only promotes environmental stewardship and helps people save money on their electricity bill, but it also creates a healthier atmosphere inside the home.

Thoroughly insulating a house with foam reduces the amount of contaminants from outside and it cuts back on humidity, which causes mold growth. And using paint and adhesives with low volatile organic compounds, better known as VOCs, can help minimize discomfort for people with chemical sensitivities or respiratory problems.

Formaldehyde-free plywood and wood also emit fewer VOCs, and double-paned windows insulate better than regular windows and they block noise out of the home.

"Any kind of man-made materials are putting off a lot of these volatile organic compounds," Friesenhahn said. "It's definitely a big issue to some people, like young kids and the elderly."

Imagine certifies all of its homes through Build San Antonio Green, Energy Star and the U.S. Department of Energy's Builders Challenge programs. Their standard home is 30 percent more efficient than code, and they also offer options for homebuyers to bring that level up.

Kris Zebrowski, communication and outreach coordinator for Build San Antonio Green, said the residential green building program has certified more than 600 homes as green builds since 2004. Most residences that are certified green in the city are newly built single-family homes. Although some property owners retrofit houses to make them greener, it's difficult to tell how much is actually being done for certification purposes.

Zebrowski said most people appear to be interested in purchasing green homes to save money by using less energy and water. The organization offers four levels of green homes, ranked by the home's energy performance. Homes on the system's second tier save owners an average of \$450 on bills per year, Zebrowski said. Third-tier homes save an average of \$900 per year.

Many custom-home builders have joined Build San Antonio Green, but for the last few years Imagine has been the only volume builder in the market committed to building everything under the program.

Late last year, Lennar Homes joined Build San Antonio Green, making Lennar the first national builder in San Antonio to commit to having all of its local homes certified under the program.

Of course, there are builders who have other certifications, like Clayton Homes, which offers homes with the company's own [Energy Saver Plus](#) package and Energy Star-certified homes.

And Meritage Homes is opening a new green community in Converse with homes that are two to three times more efficient than standard Energy Star homes. The company says it offers the certified homes to customers at no additional cost.

Proponents of green builds say that while the homes are more expensive, long-term energy savings make them worth the investment.

"The prices of energy are doing nothing but going up," said [Mike Scott](#), owner of San Antonio-based [BuiltSmart Resources](#), a custom-home builder that does retrofits and installs green features into new homes.

For those looking to sell a house, Scott said that adding green features and attaining certification can help a home stand out in a buyer's market.

"I would go in and make it as energy-efficient as possible," Scott said. "I would be setting myself apart." The city's first net-zero model home opened earlier this week at 2614 E. Ramblewood St., off of U.S. 281 north of Borgfeld Drive. The home, built by BuiltSmart, generates 3 percent more power than it consumes. The home also is Energy Star rated and has an Emerald certification under the [National Association of Home Builders](#).

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To build the home on your lot would cost about 10 to 12 percent more than a comparable home with no green features, Scott said.

“Payback on a home like that is five to seven years if you’re looking at the big picture,” Scott said.

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