



Insulating against the economy

By Sarah Cox

It makes perfect sense that while homeowners and businesses are tightening their belts, they are doing so with one eye to energy conservation as they choose to invest money in methods that will give them long-term returns. That is what Dustin Derrick, president of Evergreen Insulation, has found.

“Our market has increased in certain areas. While we do install traditional insulation, we focus on energy efficiency. A lot of people are interested in spending more money up front to realize a monthly savings,” he explained.

Because Derrick is certified through EarthCraft, the National Association of Home Builders’ green building program and will be earning his certification in the Building Performance Institution as an analyst, he can determine what is the best insulation to put where in a home. It’s a customized analysis, he said.

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Evergreen offers three main products — soy-based spray foam, spray cellulose made of recycled paper products and formaldehyde-free fiberglass. Evergreen is the only local insulation installer that provides these options to their clients, so Derrick can, for instance, put one type of insulation in the walls and another type in the attic.

The most popular type, he said, is the spray-in foam, but it’s also the most expensive, and he takes that into consideration when designing an insulation plan for a home.

“We do all Green Valley Builder’s work. We looked at the cost, decided to use spray

cellulose, which is 80 to 85 percent recycled product, in the walls and use foam in the roof to help keep the HVAC in a conditioned space,” he said. “There are a lot of people out there getting on the Internet and seeing that spray foam is popular, and they don’t know that they have options.”

Additionally, he said caulking and insulation in attics to seal the envelope are the easiest ways to improve heating and cooling expenses.

The spray cellulose has been tested to be about 30 percent more efficient than traditional fiberglass batting,

he said. A homeowner could spend about \$2,000 more on a whole house if he chose the former, but Derrick said he would begin to recuperate the investment after about two years.

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Evergreen, which works on both existing and new homes, is promoting the national economic stimulus package that gives homeowners 30 percent, up to \$1,500, in tax credits.

The New River Valley has caught on, not just to energy-efficient products, but to sustainable building products that are more environmentally friendly. But, he reiterated, the bottom line is that people are interested in saving money.

“I think that goes into everything,” he said.

EFFICIENCY IN A RECESSION

According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE), the advice is simple: Do not buy a new heating or cooling system before tightening up your house. Ways a homeowner can do this are to get an energy audit, insulate with a better grade insulation than what was available 20 years ago, seal air leaks, and upgrade windows and doors. Dustin Derrick of Evergreen Insulation added that putting caulk or weather stripping around windows and exterior doors also helps.

According to data released on March 18 by the ACEEE, consumers and businesses taking advantage of energy-efficient initiatives could help reduce utility bills nationally by \$168.6 billion. Derrick suggested replacing light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.

The Department of Energy estimates that heating and cooling in the average American home account for up to 70 percent of the energy used, and that inadequate insulation and air leakage are the leading factors in energy waste. Upgrading insulation to current building codes, said Derrick, will help alleviate air leaks.

OF NOTE

The Virginia Tech annual spring plant sale will be held April 30, May 1-2 at the Hahn Horticulture Garden and Greenhouse complex from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Cash or checks will be accepted.