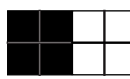


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'In some cases you've got to do quite a bit of forensic investigation to actually find where you need to tackle the problem'

— *Shervin Akhavi, energy advisor*

GREEN HOMES



PETER REDMAN / NATIONAL POST

The pièce de résistance, GreenSaver energy advisor Shervin Akhavi conducts the blower-door test and lowers the pressure inside the house with an extractor fan then tests for air leaks with a "smoke pencil."

Use eco trailer as cottage, ski chalet

Green Street, the International Home Show's showcase for eco-friendly products and services, has added the miniHome SOLO travel trailer to its 2006 lineup.

Developed by Northlander Industries, the 36x7.6-foot RV is compact but ideal for use as a cottage, guest cabin or ski chalet. Others include onboard solar panels, wind turbine, propane tanks and a

natural cooling ventilation system. The SOLO costs less than many RVs and pre-fabs while its self-sustaining power frees the owner from rising utility costs.

The miniHome appears only at the International Home Show, Fri., Oct. 6 through Mon., Oct. 9, at the International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd. Call 416-512-1305 or visit internationalhomeshow.ca.

National Post

CSI-like investigators audit your home

Toronto company saves the planet one energy audit at a time

SHERRY NOIK-BENT
Live Green

Bob Duncanson has a hole in his house you could drive a Mini Cooper through. Not literally, of course, but the gaps around windows and door frames, the uninsulated cavities behind walls and the leaks from baseboards, vents and the attic are continually sucking energy out the equivalent of a nearly 4x4-foot opening.

How does he know this? He had an energy audit performed on his turn-of-the-century brick-and-shingle semi by GreenSaver, a non-profit Toronto company that specializes in "saving the planet one home at a time."

With another winter on the way and energy prices moving in only one direction — up — many homeowners are looking for ways to keep their energy bills from going through the roof. An audit can pinpoint all the places your home is wasting energy and creating common problems such as drafty rooms, window condensation, basement mould and electric shocks.

"Proper upgrading of an older house [anything built before the '70s] will generate huge benefits in terms of your energy bill, in terms of the comfort and in terms of — there is hard evidence of this in the U.S. — the resale value," says GreenSaver president and CEO Vladan Veljovic.

Mr. Duncanson had one more reason — the environment. The former co-proprietor, with his wife, of an eco-goods retail store on the Danforth says, "Everything we do in our lives is a statement. So we want to use this house, this renovation, as an opportunity to show people what can be done."

While newer homes are generally more airtight and energy-efficient, the typical Toronto midtown mid-century or downtown Victorian suffers from outdated building standards, poor design or substandard retrofits.

The Duncansons' home, which the empty-nester couple plans to move into in November, scored 32 on the 100-point scale that GreenSaver uses. If they implement all the suggested upgrades, they stand to more than double their energy-efficiency rating to 66 and save about 50% on their costs. The lifelong environmentalists will also be happy to know they would be reducing the home's greenhouse gas emissions by 8.8 tonnes a year.

But they won't have any help from the federal government, which earlier this year eliminated the financial incentives

**PROPER UPGRADING
OF AN OLDER HOUSE
WILL GENERATE HUGE
BENEFITS IN TERMS
OF YOUR ENERGY BILL**

offered under the EnerGuide for Houses program.

Sarah Climenhaga says she was a little disappointed to hear the cash-back scheme was cut, "but I still felt it was money well spent if it meant our renovation dollars went a lot further." In the more than 60-year-old Bathurst and St. Clair-area home she shares with her husband and two young children, she has an ancient furnace, hot spots and cold spots and poor indoor air quality. Her home scored 43, with the potential to achieve a 68 — very close to the typical rating of a new home that meets current Building Code requirements.

Homeowners may be surprised to learn that the majority of modifications don't come with a big price tag and a

month of construction dust.

Mr. Duncanson will get the biggest bang for his buck by insulating his walls, especially the exterior elevations, where archaic 1/2-inch-thick tarpaper siding substitutes for real brick. GreenSaver energy advisor Shervin Akhavi estimates that could be done for about \$2 a square foot. And Ms. Climenhaga would see a big jump in efficiency by replacing her clunker of a furnace with a newer model — something she planned to do anyway as part of her extensive basement reno.

An audit can unearth these and other areas for improvement in a sort of residential version of the *CSI* TV show. "In some cases you've got to do quite a bit of forensic investigation to actually find where you need to tackle the problem," says Mr. Veljovic. "We've seen an energy advisor takes the measurements of the house and makes note of any issues the homeowner has noticed. Then he checks the insulation throughout the structure, sometimes drilling small, unobtrusive holes in walls or ceilings, other times poking a skewer-like stick into the spaces around electrical outlets. The pièce de résistance — always a big hit with kids, says Mr. Akhavi — is the blower-door test, in which the house is depressurized and a "smoke pencil" is used to detect the sources of leaks.

Finally, a computer model spits out a summary of problems, along with proposed solutions and the estimated energy savings expected to result from them. The two- to three-hour process costs \$300. Many customers pay an additional \$50 for a follow-up visit that will measure how well the repairs succeeded.

With third-party incentives gone, homeowners have to weigh the value of the audit in more than just economic terms, says Mr. Veljovic. "We've seen houses where people would stay in just one room because the other rooms were too drafty." After the retrofit, "suddenly the whole house becomes a home."

National Post

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