



Retrofit Your Home for Immediate Net Savings

In these trying economic times, with conventional investments doing so poorly and people looking for ways to economize, it's important to know that you can actually come out ahead with solar and energy efficiency in many cases. As you probably know from past columns in Going Green, Sustainable Energy Group's specialty is finding investments that can save more every year than they cost. We refer to such investments as being "cost-effective". The Going Green column has also noted that we have many fine companies in Nevada County offering energy products and services, as well as a bevy of locals interested in taking on do-it-yourself retrofit projects. So for today's issue we'll focus on several of the many cost-effective opportunities available and – most importantly – where to go for help.

First off, past articles from Going Green that address cost-effective energy choices (as well as some that aren't) are available here –

<http://www.theenergyguy.com/Articles.html>.

Energy investments that save more than they cost are many, but your best choices typically depend on your specific situation. Let's start with solar energy. If you have a sunny spot on your roof or somewhere in your yard, solar power is a good choice if your electricity bill averages about \$150 per month or more. That's because the combination of the PG&E rebate, Federal tax credit, electricity savings and mortgage interest deduction on the money borrowed can add up to savings that exceed the cost of the loan required. You may also recall that these savings grow larger every year into the future, improving your household's ability to ride out tough economic times.

A recent article on solar water heating had an example showing the savings exceeding the costs after five years given a relatively short (10 yr) loan term. With a longer loan term, or a do-it-yourself installation, you could reduce this "payback" to one year. Households with electric water heaters stand to gain the most, followed by those using gas water heaters. And households with two or more occupants typically pencil out better than single person households. Past articles (refer to link above) give additional examples and, for the technically inclined, there's even a comprehensive page showing how to use a spreadsheet program to compare the life cycle cost of various water heating alternatives here - <http://www.theenergyguy.com/lifecyclecost.html> (complete with spreadsheets you can download).

Energy efficiency opportunities for the typical home are many, and include more efficient equipment, air-sealing your home to reduce air leakage, and fixing leaky ducts (one of the most common problems in existing buildings, and highest payback opportunities). EnergyStar has a great page on the subject of air sealing for do-it-yourselfers here –

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=home_sealing.hm_improvement_sealing.

PG&E has a do-it-yourself energy audit program available online from their web site. Go to

www.PGE.com, click on “For My Home” (or “For My Business”), then use the drop-down menu titled “Save Energy & Money” to choose the Energy Analyzer, learn about rebates available, and much more.

My public service web site – www.TheEnergyGuy.com – also has a wealth of pages and links intended to help folks find and implement cost-effective energy solutions. I spend a great deal of time helping to steer people in the right direction in addition to running a full-time energy business and, as a result, I get a lot of phone calls and emails from folks wanting to do things themselves. Unfortunately running a business and answering phone calls from people that aren’t of a business nature doesn’t make for a very productive workplace. That’s where my web site and email come in. The web site is a way to get people the kind of information I would otherwise find myself repeating over and over on the phone. And with email I can answer questions for folks when I’m not tied up running the business.

So let me encourage you to visit the web sites listed above. And feel free to email me if you have a question or aren’t finding what you’re looking for out there. Let’s work together to make our households, businesses and community more sustainable for ourselves and future generations!

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