

## GREENWASH OR HOGWASH

### Beware of Dubious Claims



If you own a television or computer, you probably have seen headlines touting the amazing energy- and money-saving qualities of new products and services:

*"Slash your power bills by 80%!"*

*"Build your own professional wind and solar power system for less than \$200!"*

*"Save up to 25% on your monthly electric bills with a surge protector!"*

*"Paint additive improves home insulation ... blocks heat loss by over 20%."*

*"Save up to 50% on your heating bill!"*

Sound like hogwash? Could be "greenwash," a term used to describe inflated or misleading claims about environmental and energy-saving performance. Greenwashing is a growing concern in the home construction industry, driven by consumer interest in energy efficiency and fueled by federal stimulus funding and other incentives for businesses that generate green jobs. It has led to unrealistic expectations on energy and cost savings and is hurting the legitimate energy-efficiency market.

Many credible products and proven technologies are available to help homeowners save significant energy and money. Minnesota Power has promoted energy-efficient home construction for more than 20 years, educating builders through the Triple E New Construction program and the annual Energy Design Conference & Expo. In recognition of its efforts to promote energy-efficient construction and environmental protection, Minnesota Power was honored with an ENERGY STAR® Leadership in Housing Award in 2009.

Home construction professionals who understand energy-efficiency and building science can help their customers avoid scams and costly mistakes. Thorough research is prudent before making any energy-saving investment, but certain products and services, such as those listed below, are notorious for overstated energy-saving benefits:

- **"Do-it-yourself" or "build-your-own" renewable energy systems (solar or wind)**—Read the fine print and be cautious of cost- and energy-savings promises that seem too good to be true. Output claims for wind systems may assume round-the-clock operation at top capacity, defying the laws of nature and physics. Remember, homeowners who hope to sell excess renewable energy back to the power company must use certified equipment that synchs with the electric grid.
- **Quartz infrared portable electric space heaters**—Heating cost savings may be inflated or depend on unique circumstances; expensive features, such as ceramic quartz tubes, do not change the amount of heat produced or the cost of operation. Wattage is the key.
- **Surge protection equipment (transient voltage surge suppressors)**—These products protect equipment from power surges, but don't save measurable amounts of energy because spikes last only fractions of a second.
- **Radiant barriers and reflective insulation material**—R-value (insulation) claims sometimes are exaggerated by three or four times. Installing these products in an attic may be effective in warm climates but has little impact on heating and cooling loads in our cold northern region. Also, avoid installing them under slabs, since at least one reflective surface must face an air space to operate properly.
- **Insulating paint**—R-value claims may not be substantiated by research and science.

In general, be wary of unrealistic claims related to R-value, HVAC efficiency, and emission-free or carbon-neutral technology. Fuel cost comparisons also can be misleading because price changes vary in frequency and amount. Look at two- to five-year averages and added fees for true comparisons.

The Energy Design Conference & Expo is an excellent resource for current, credible information about energy-related issues and high performance housing. A team of energy experts reviews presenters, exhibitors and products to ensure high standards.