

Why Utah's Home Energy Code Needs Updating

Media Backgrounder
January 2012

Overview

When you buy a new home, you assume that it was built to the highest standards for energy efficiency and comfort. This is not always the case in Utah. Aside from a few leading homebuilders, most new homes in Utah are built below the minimum standard for energy efficiency, resulting in owners paying hundreds more on energy bills each year and thousands on home repairs. This is because the state's home energy code – which sets energy-efficiency requirements for new home construction and renovations - is vastly outdated.

It takes legislative action to update the code. Last year, Utah lawmakers passed up the opportunity to update the residential energy code, even though they had updated the commercial energy code previously. This year, lawmakers have another chance if they decide to pass HB 262, a bill proposed by Republican Fred Cox.

Below is more information about Utah's home energy code situation and how updating the code will benefit Utah homeowners and all Utahns.

Why Update Utah's Home Energy Code?

Utah's current home energy code is based on the 2006 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC). The International Code Council updates the IECC is every three years, so the 2006 code is already two versions behind latest code available - the 2012 IECC. While the 2012 code is quite new and only a few jurisdictions have adopted it, the 2009 IECC has been available for 4 years. Numerous studies show that building homes to meet the 2009 IECC saves homeowners money on energy bills above and beyond the cost of building a home to code. Plus, a broad coalition of local governments, construction and utility industry leaders, energy experts and the state's building code commission support adopting the 2009 code.

- According to “2012 Western States Survey” a poll by Public Opinion Strategies/FM3 released on Jan. 30, 2012, **76% of Utahns support updating the state's home energy code**. A Consumers Union poll released in August 2011 found that 82% of Americans want homes that meet national efficiency standards.
- According to an analysis of the 2009 IECC by the Utah Uniform Building Codes Commission (UBCC), **the average Utah home built to the 2009 code would save households 10% - 17% on energy bills - or about \$175 a year**. A March 2011 [Building Codes Assistance Project](#) (BCAP) analysis of the 2009 code found that **Utah homeowners would save \$199 a year**.
- The BCAP analysis also found that Utah homes built to the 2009 code would add just \$825 to construction costs – an increase of only .3 percent to the average cost of building

a home. **However, the energy savings would pay for these costs in only 10 months.** After that, energy savings would continue to accrue month after month, year after year.

- New [utility rebates](#) available to Utah's homebuilders cut the cost of building homes to the 2009 code by at least \$400.
- **The average cost to fix a home's energy systems after it is built is about \$5,000,** according to the state's weatherization agency. This is **up to ten times more** than it costs to build a home to the 2009 code in the first place!
- In September 2010, the [UBCC recommended that lawmakers adopt updated residential energy codes](#), noting that the savings for homeowners greatly outweigh any increase in construction or mortgage costs to build homes to the new code.
- Supporters of updated home energy codes include: Rocky Mountain Power, Rio Tinto Kennecott Land, Salt Lake Home Builders Association, Utah Housing Coalition, Utah chapters of the North American Insulation Manufacturers Association and Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association, Salt Lake City Council and County Commission, Park City, Summit County, and Moab City Councils, and Utah Clean Energy.
- Ensuring homes are energy-efficient not only saves homeowner money, it also protects them from rising energy costs and makes home ownership more affordable. Energy is one of the biggest expenses of homeownership and will only take a bigger bite out of household income in the future. **Energy prices in Utah have risen 4 - 5% every year for the past 10 years, and Rocky Mountain Power is raising rates again this year.**
- Homes and other buildings consume about 75% of the electricity produced in the state. Utah utilities are struggling to keep pace with the state's growing demand for energy. **Rocky Mountain Power estimates that by 2015, it will be 1,500 megawatts short of meeting Utah's energy needs.** This is the equivalent to the output of two large coal-fired power plants. The more energy-efficient buildings are, the less energy they use which reduces pressure on utilities to build expensive new power plants or buy power on the open market which all Utahns pay for through their energy bills.
- Homes can be around for decades. If they aren't built energy-efficient from the start, unnecessary energy waste will drive up energy bills for the life of a home. Ensuring homes are built to higher energy-saving standards helps lock-in energy savings for homeowners for good.

For more information, contact Utah Clean Energy:

- Kevin Emerson, Senior Policy & Regulatory Associate: 801-608-0850;
kevin@utahcleanenergy.org
- Brandy Smith, Communications and Program Coordinator: 801-363-4046 x100;
brandy@utahcleanenergy.org