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The Show

What Makes 'Green' Home? Arizona Leads US in Green Home Building

By Lauren Gilger

Arizona is one of the hottest states in the country when it comes to temperatures – and real estate. It leads the country in building energy-efficient, Energy Star-certified “green” homes.

“Our building envelopes have become tighter and tighter and homes are more and more energy efficient,” said Valley Realtor Jan Green. She has specialized in green homes since she saw the market starting to change just before the crash in 2007.

“I started to recognize that homes were becoming more and more energy efficient and the building codes, every time they come out, every three years, they’re even tighter envelopes,” she said, “So, it’s only going to get better.”

A “green” home can be [Energy Star certified](#) to meet U.S. Department of Environmental Protection standards, or [LEED certified](#), by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Green homes often include things like high-performance doors and windows that are sealed tight, high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, low-flow faucets and shower heads and thicker walls and ceilings filled with spray-foam insulation.

The market for them is being driven by builders who are taking advantage of incentives and rebates, Green said. And it’s just what people want. The National Association of Realtors did a [survey](#) that showed heating and cooling costs are important to 86 percent of home buyers.

“That’s what people recognize the most, is that you can dial your dollars down and do those things without adding solar panels,” Green said.

Builders are getting on board. The National Association of Home Builders recently did a [survey](#) and found by 2020 more than half of home builders around the country plan to be doing 60 percent or more of their homes “green.”

According to West Valley realtor Ali Al-Asady, there are a few different kinds of buyers for green homes.

“You got the people who live by principle,” he said. “They believe in that, and they believe that we all should do good for the environment.”

Then, he said, you have the “eco-chic” buyer who’s out to follow the hottest trends in real estate. Then you have those like Dr. Ahmad Kadhim. He didn’t know he was looking for a green home, but, he learned about it and realized he could still get a modern, open-concept home that was also environmentally friendly.

“After going through what goes into the home and how the home actually manages to save you a lot of money, despite it being really open” he was sold, he said.

He’s in the process of buying a new, modern home in the Arcadia neighborhood of Phoenix that’s Energy Star certified and fit with all of the best in efficient technology.

It’s an investment he thinks is worth it. “Down the road you will be saving tons of money,” Kadhim said.

To become Energy Star certified, builders must meet a set of rigorous standards set by the EPA that the agency said will result in up to 30 percent energy savings compared to a typical new home.

[Studies](#) have shown buyers might pay about 5-10 percent more for a green home, but they also add value on resale. When you’re living there, Energy Star-certified homes save homeowners about \$300 a year, according to the EPA. Each one also reduces greenhouse gases by about [3700 pounds per year](#).

Kadhim’s future house even has a moisture detection system to improve air quality and a ventilation system that balances the air conditioning system throughout the house.

“The airflow in the building is extremely important to the efficiency of the home,” said Al-Asady, Kadhim’s realtor. With a green home he said, “It’s more about what you don’t see, than what you see.”

Al-Asady teaches classes about green homes to other realtors organized by the Arizona Association of Realtors. He said the market for homes like these is only growing.

Realtor Jan Green agreed. “I think there’s a lot of people, whether it’s (for) political reasons, they don’t want to pay a utility bill, or whether it’s just to save in their own pocketbook and knowing that they’re doing the right thing,” she said.

Green is a certified EcoBroker as well as a GREEN designee, a program from the National Association of Realtors.

She said growing this market carries big implications for the environment as well.

“The one thing that people don’t understand is our homes are the biggest contributor to greenhouse gases,” Green said. “If we can lower our energy bills, we lower our greenhouse gases. That’s huge!”

