

Why Utah's Home Energy Code Needs Updating

Media Backgrounder

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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 homes in Utah are built below the minimum standard for energy efficiency, resulting in homeowners 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home energy code – which sets energy-efficiency requirements for new home construction and renovations – is vastly outdated.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. This year, Utah lawmakers passed up the opportunity to update the residential energy code, even though they had already updated the commercial energy code previously. Now they are reconsidering.

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 IECC is updated every three years, and the 2006 code is already two versions behind latest code available, the 2012 IECC. While the 2012 code is fairly new on the scene, the 2009 IECC has been available for quite some time, and is proven to be cost-effective for Utah builders and homeowners. Plus, a number of city and county governments, construction and utility industry leaders, energy efficiency experts *and* the state's own building code commission already support adopting the 2009 code.

- According to a recent analysis of the 2009 IECC by the Utah Uniform Building Codes Commission (UUBCC), **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 about \$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. The UUBCC analysis found that it would cost \$983 more to build a home to the 2009 code.
- **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 **four times more**

than it costs to build a home to the 2009 code in the first place. Fixes include punching holes in walls to add insulation, adding insulation to attics, sealing duct work, doors and windows, and replacing or tuning inefficient heating and cooling systems.

- Last fall, the [UUBCC overwhelmingly recommended that lawmakers adopt updated residential building codes](#), noting that the savings for homeowners greatly outweigh any increase in construction or mortgage costs to build homes to the new code. Other supporters of updated codes include: Rocky Mountain Power, Rio Tinto, Utah chapters of the North American Insulation Manufacturers Association and Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association, Salt Lake City Council and County Commission, Park City and Moab City Councils, Utah Housing Coalition and Utah Clean Energy.
- During the 2010 legislative session, Utah lawmakers adopted the latest energy codes for commercial construction plus a half a dozen other commercial code updates. But lawmakers left homes out in the cold – literally. They did it again this year when lawmakers passed up the opportunity to amend a bill to update the residential code. Lawmakers are now reviewing Utah’s home energy code during their interim session. There is a chance they may develop a bill to update the code for consideration next year.
- 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 just asked for a 13% rate hike.**
- 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.