

## **FIX IT UP!**

*Bruce Turner*

### Energy Stardom, Part One

You just can't catch a break today, at least on your energy costs. You come home from work grinding your teeth about the price of gas – probably after wasting a bunch of it sitting in traffic – and then you open your PG&E bill and start grinding all over again. Energy sure is expensive today.

The good news is that while there's not much you can do about saving at the gas pump – unless you want to take the bus or buy a Prius – there's a whole lot you can do inside your home to save energy and reduce your bill. I've got a ton of suggestions for doing that.

One easy way to save money is to use Energy Star appliances. Energy Star is a government-backed program – you can check it out at <http://www.energystar.gov/> – that essentially offers third-party endorsements to appliances based on how efficiently they use electricity, natural gas or water. It's hard for me to believe that some people still buy new appliances without even checking for the Energy Star rating. Anytime you change out an old refrigerator, stove, washer, dryer, dishwasher or water heater, you can get a new unit so much more efficient that it pays for itself within a few years. And there are often tax credits or rebates available from utilities or government programs that will reward you for purchasing Energy Star appliances.

Are you planning on replacing any windows? We're installing nothing but energy-efficient Low-E windows these days. Low-E is a double-pane window with gas sealed between the panes. The gas and a microscopic metallic coating combine to block dangerous UV rays and radiant heat and offer better insulation. It's a good 20 percent more efficient than an old-fashioned single-pane window.

Are you having some large-scale exterior work done on your house? Are you replacing your roof or doing dry rot repair on your outside walls? While you're spending the time and money to have those walls opened, take advantage of the opportunity to do some additional energy-saving retrofitting at very little additional cost.

For example, you can add a window on a south-facing wall to deliver passive solar heating and reduce your energy needs. If the roof is being opened up anyway, consider adding skylights or sun tunnels that can bring in solar heat and introduce natural lighting to dark spaces in your home. And if the exterior walls or ceiling are open, it's easy at that point for the contractor to add more insulation (which the building code now requires anyway) with very little added labor. The material itself is inexpensive and the extra insulation will pay you back through your reduced utility bill.

Are we having fun yet? Good, because in my next column I'll tell you how to save energy costs on lighting and warming your home and heating your water – and we'll talk about how solar panels can have PG&E paying you, instead of the other way around.

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