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Apr 4 - 18, 2015 Volume 23 Issue 07

ypnexthome.ca

NEW HOME GUIDE

GTA Edition

//INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

LIVING GREEN

What it means in today's new homes

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If there's one buzzword in today's new home building industry that has consumers confused, it's Green.

Intended to indicate materials, features and building techniques that are environmentally friendly, or leave less of an environmental footprint, the word is sometimes misused.

However, if we accept environmental friendliness as the main goal of Green, then today's new homes in Ontario fit that standard by design. The Ontario Building Code is continually being updated, and as of Jan. 1, 2012, every company applying for a building permit in Ontario has to comply with EnerGuide 80 levels of energy efficiency. The result is less wear and tear on the environment and utilities cost savings for owners.

Add to that third-party rating systems such as Energy Star and LEED, and in the case of some builders, Green programs that go above and beyond, and the picture looks even brighter. For example, at Heathwood Homes, we have created our own Green Home Energy Program that combines Energy Star features and many other environmentally friendly elements.

If you are considering purchasing a new home and Green characteristics are important to you, find out what each of the builders you are considering means by the word. Calling something Green does not necessarily mean that it is good for you

and/or the environment. Think about and research claims according to potential harm and obsolescence.

For example, when the "ecology" became a focus in Canada in the 1970s, builders installed urea-formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI) in homes with the belief that it would be more energy efficient and help the environment. We were misinformed, and the product had not gone through enough testing. When it was installed improperly, it caused overexposure to the toxic formaldehyde. Its use was banned in Canada in 1980. Ask whether the products you see promoted as Green are well tested and proven effective.

Going back to the 1970s again, remember the initial hype about solar energy? That form of energy harvesting was introduced too early in its development and was not effective in the early days. We are hearing about solar energy again today, but we have to question whether it is advanced enough to make an actual difference to homeowners. Time will tell with thermal energy and windmills as well. The jury's not in on any of these as far as effectiveness.

It seems to me that the Green concept is advancing at a rapid rate. Another question to ask is whether the environmentally friendly features being advertised will be obsolete in a short time. The new homes of today are the resale homes of tomorrow, so you want to ensure your choice is as advanced as possible.

The bottom line is to choose your green criteria wisely when you are new home shopping, and keep in mind that adding elements to save on energy and water usage often add to the cost of your home.

At Heathwood Homes, we decided to find out for ourselves the real impact of certain green elements. We developed a Green demonstration model home in Richmond Hill to monitor how efficient various advanced conservation features, environmentally friendly systems and materials actually are. For us, it was about using common sense rather than jumping to other people's conclusions.

Certainly, if environmental friendliness is important to you, and it is with most new-home buyers today, ask the appropriate questions of the sales representatives and do some research on your own. With so much information available on the Internet, you will find a variety of sources to consider. The good news is that new home builders are making more environmentally conscious choices than ever before!

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