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Energy Codes for New N.M. Homes Promote Savings

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This weekend, I watched one of those home improvement shows on TV. In a relatively new house, the team had to rip out walls, ceilings and floors to make the house habitable.

Inadequate ventilation and insulation, inefficient lighting and shoddy windows — it was all there!

It was sad to see these people, who had bought what they thought would be a great investment and comfortable home realize that their house was a money trap. And to make matters worse I knew what the show didn't point out.

Not only were these people going to pay lots of money fixing up their home, but they had been paying way too much in monthly utility bills.

Thank goodness I live in New Mexico, where homeowners are guaranteed a well-built, efficient home when they purchase a new house. There will be no surprises in a few years, as new energy codes will guarantee well-insulated walls, attics and ceilings, as well as tight building shells. Plus, utility bills will be as low as possible — for the life of the home.

Those low utility bills are super important, especially now. PNM's request for a rate increase of 22 percent is just the first in what will surely be a series of increases in energy costs for New Mexicans. Well-built, efficient homes are an insurance policy for homeowners against those rising energy costs. Homes that are built to be efficient allow homeowners to moderate their energy costs while maintaining health, safety and comfort.

Albuquerque and the state of New Mexico recognize that citizens deserve new home construction that provides the health and safety delivered by energy conservation codes, as well as the protection against steep increases in energy costs that these codes deliver. Codes are supposed to protect the health and safety of people, and that's exactly what the energy codes in Albuquerque and New Mexico do.

Building codes protect us from buildings that collapse or spread fire rapidly. Energy codes protect us from homes where livable temperatures can't be maintained, or that make it financially impossible to stay warm in the winter or operate appliances. A bonus of the energy codes is that they also increase our comfort level. Efficient homes are easier to heat, cool, power, light and live in because they are built right initially.

There has been a lot of discussion in the media lately about building codes and the role of energy conservation codes. That discussion has centered only on the purchase price of new homes and has ignored the major costs associated with owning a home: maintenance, heating, cooling, powering appliances and lighting.

These monthly utility and maintenance costs continue throughout the entire life of the home and often eat up a large fraction of a homeowners monthly budget. Good energy codes minimize those monthly costs, saving homeowners money and making the purchase of a new home more financially attractive, or in many peoples' cases it makes it financially possible for the first time.

Savings in energy bills begin from the very first month of ownership for the average homeowner under the new state codes. The provisions in the energy conservation code result in savings in the monthly energy bill that more than outweigh the small increase in the monthly mortgage payment.

Money savings from day one of ownership; it's definitely hard to beat that! I'll continue to watch those home improvement shows, and I look forward to seeing homes in New Mexico getting fancy facelifts — new paint, new countertops, cool new furniture — made possible in part because utility bills have been lowered thanks to strong energy codes.

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