



Photo Caption *Ardently Green inspectors (certified by the Building Performance Institute) perform a “blower door” test, through which they can determine with infrared cameras where air is leaking between walls and floors.*

Retrofitting a Non-green Home It’s Increasingly Necessary and Sometimes Easy

Written by **Jennifer Sergent** Photography by **Ardently Green**

Let’s face it: Most of us are not planning to build a new home or embark on a major remodel anytime soon. But that doesn’t mean we should be left out of the green movement. In fact, greening existing homes is probably more important than building new ones, considering how much energy they waste.

A May report from The Brookings Institution found that the Washington metropolitan area ranked 89th out of the nation’s 100 largest metro areas in terms of our carbon emissions, almost 40 percent of which come from residential and commercial building energy use.

In terms of residential energy use, Washington ranks dead last in the amount of carbon the average resident emits. Our electricity use in particular also puts us in last place.

That’s pretty bad, considering almost everyone got scolded in the report: “Americans are driving more, building more, consuming more energy, and emitting more carbon. Rising energy prices, growing dependence on imported fuels, and accelerating global climate change make the nation’s growth patterns unsustainable.”

In other words, going green doesn’t seem so much of a trend anymore as something that’s truly necessary.

“None of what’s happening now is unexpected. This was predicted 20 years ago – it’s just happening all at once,” says Jason Holstine, owner of Amicus Green Building Center in Kensington, MD. Eighty percent of what the 3-year-old company does is education, Holstine reports – advising customers in all the different ways (and budget levels) of making their homes more efficient. Amicus performs workshops around the area and has numerous helpful tip sheets on improving almost every aspect of your home.

Sometimes it’s shocking how much energy is wasted in a home, which could be saved with relatively minor improvements in insulation, says Bob Weatherwax, CEO and founder of Ardently Green, a new company in the Ardent Home Services Group that launched in June.

One recent energy audit Ardently Green performed revealed that the homeowner “was basically paying to air-condition the attic,” Weatherwax says. In another case, a homeowner couldn’t figure out why an upstairs bathroom was perpetually too hot. Turns out that the home’s builder had forgotten to insulate the part of the attic that was directly over that space.

“The big thing is air sealing and insulation,” Weatherwax says, “every place in your house where your top floor meets unconditioned space.”

Because Ardently Green is part of a group of construction and contracting companies, it can perform retrofit projects both small and large after it produces an initial “GreenPrint” energy audit, which analyzes all areas where a home could be more energy efficient and improve air quality.

Amicus Green Builder Center offers similar services, plus a host of eco-friendly home products, from green flooring, paints, and lighting to meters that record how much electricity is being used at any one time in the home. “You see how it spikes when your AC goes on,” Holstine says.

One of the worst energy hogs that is perhaps easiest to fix? Keeping your electronics plugged in all the time – they use electricity even when they are turned off. Holstine sells a “smart strip” that connects to the electronics, so you can flip one switch to cut the connection, instead of plugging and unplugging everything all the time.

Such examples are ways we can all cut our energy diet without too much pain or investment.

Carolyn O’Keefe, communications director for Ardently Green, says: “A big, giant environmental problem and [energy] cost savings can be fixed in one fell swoop.”