

Home Performance with Energy Star Comes to Oregon

Oregon has recently joined the ranks of states supplying the valuable Home Performance with Energy Star home energy service. Sponsored by EPA, Home Performance with Energy Star was launched in 2001 by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). This innovative program coaches contractors to implement whole-house energy efficiency improvements, resulting in safer, healthier, and more comfortable homes that are less expensive to operate. This whole-house approach to diagnosing and improving homes has been transforming the U.S. housing market for five years.

Since its inception, Home Performance with Energy Star has been adopted by a growing number of states (see “Home Performance with Energy Star”).

Program Evolves

Energy Trust of Oregon officially launched Home Performance with Energy Star to Portland-area contractors in January 2006. Started in 2002, Energy Trust is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to energy efficiency and to the development of renewable energy. The group is authorized by the Oregon Public Utility Commission to administer conservation and renewable energy programs for Oregon customers of Pacific Power, Portland General Electric, and NW Natural. Customers of these utilities pay a public purpose charge to support investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

The Home Performance with Energy Star program offers training and certification services to participating contractors and is an important component of the Home Energy Savings program, which was established by Energy Trust in 2003. Says Diane Ferington, residential sector manager for Energy Trust of Oregon, Incorporated, “The Energy Star label is



Rod Street, Home Performance with Energy Star account manager for CSG, examines a home's insulation.

ENERGY TRUST OF OREGON

the ‘Good Housekeeping seal of approval’ for products and services that meet strict guidelines for energy efficiency. We are proud to be offering Home Performance with Energy Star to better serve homeowners in Oregon. More than 50% of the single-family homes here were built before 1980, and older homes certainly present the biggest opportunity for energy savings.”

In 2005, Energy Trust retained Conservation Services Group (CSG), a Massachusetts-based national energy services firm, to implement the Home Energy Savings program. CSG expanded its Portland office to administer all aspects of delivery for Home Energy Savings: field service operations, call center management, home energy review scheduling, trade ally communications, recruitment, training, and certification of contractors, as well as marketing and program management. To facilitate scheduling, CSG uses proprietary program management software to make the process of reaching entire neighborhoods more efficient.

Focusing initially on the Greater Portland area, Home Performance with Energy Star will expand statewide in regions served by Energy Trust before the end of 2006. By stimulating consumer investment in energy efficiency upgrades, technologies, and services, the program will help Oregonians control energy costs and protect the environment. According to EPA, 18% of all greenhouse gas emis-

Home Performance with Energy Star

Partners in these locations currently sponsor Home Performance with Energy Star:

- Atlanta, Georgia (Southface)
- Atlantic City, New Jersey (South Jersey Gas for the Board of Public Utilities)
- Austin, Texas (Austin Energy)
- California (California Building Performance Contractors Association)
- Colorado (E-Star Colorado)
- Idaho (Idaho Energy Division)
- Kansas City, Kansas (Metropolitan Energy Center)

- Massachusetts (NSTAR Electric, National Grid, Berkshire Gas)
- Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota (Neighborhood Energy Consortium)
- Missouri Botanical Garden's Earth-Ways Center
- New York (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority [NYSERDA] and the Long Island Power Authority [LIPA])
- Oregon (Energy Trust of Oregon, Incorporated)
- Vermont (Efficiency Vermont)
- Wisconsin (Focus on Energy)

sions in the United States come from homes. “The less energy we use, the less we are going to pollute, so it makes sense to streamline a home’s energy output by employing Home Performance with Energy Star,” says CSG Vice President Paul Berkowitz, who oversees residential programs for Energy Trust. “In addition to saving money and preserving the environment,” he says, “there are other program benefits. This initiative helps us build a network of certified trade ally contractors equipped with the latest advancements in building science to better treat homes. These allies can provide comprehensive home diagnostics, energy saving installations, and low-income financing that homeowners can take advantage of, in order to start saving money and energy immediately.”

Opportunities Abound

Building and developing the contractor infrastructure is a key component of the success of Home Performance with Energy Star. By offering training and support to the contractors, CSG and the Energy Trust are making a solid commitment to elevating the skill set of their trade ally contractors and encouraging new industry participants. CSG has trained 22 technicians, representing ten trade ally contractor firms in Oregon, and expects to include another 8 technicians in the next round of trainings. All Energy Trust trade ally contractors have to meet regional technical standards as determined by the Oregon Department of Energy and other regional energy efficiency organizations. The Building Performance Institute (BPI), the national resource for building science technology that sets the standards for residential energy performance, certifies Oregon’s home performance contractors. So far, BPI has certified eight contractors in the Greater Portland area. There are nine certified BPI contractors in the state of Oregon. Energy Trust holds trainings throughout the year. The next one will be held in October.

The whole-house approach is what sets Home Performance with Energy

Star apart from other residential energy assessments; this approach also provides new opportunities for contractors to develop their business. In Oregon, the standard elements for Home Performance with Energy Star are

- a tight building envelope, or thermal shell;
- optimally sized HVAC equipment and sealed ductwork;
- energy-efficient lighting and appliances; and
- test-in and test-out procedures.

Home Performance with Energy Star contractors have been quick to recognize the opportunity that this comprehensive diagnostic and improvement work brings. According to Berkowitz, “We have received a great response from contractors, because it’s an advanced service that enables them to provide specialized services and differentiate themselves from the competition.”

Walt Harwood is vice president of Portland-based Neil Kelly Company, Incorporated, an Energy Trust trade ally. The firm is so committed to the program that it established a special Home Performance with Energy Star division. “This program is the right thing to do,” Harwood says. “Besides saving energy and money, Home Performance with Energy Star is related to health and safety, which is very important to our company. Not only that, the certification process we have to go through also adds credibility to what we are doing.”


Harwood adds that Home Performance with Energy Star is still fairly new, so all results are not in yet. “We are investing in Home Performance with Energy Star because our company culture supports efforts to improve the environment, energy savings, indoor air quality, and sustainability. We believe we have an opportunity to build a viable Home Performance business in Oregon.”

Total Comfort Weatherization, of Salem, Oregon, also implements Home Performance with Energy Star for Energy Trust. Owner and President Jerry Page says that his company is a big fan of the program because of its whole-house approach and sophisticated diagnostics. According to Page, homeowners get very little benefit from energy efficiency improvements if the house was not first thoroughly analyzed. He says, “That’s

where Home Performance with Energy Star comes in. You don’t know what you missed until you test.”

The Energy Trust’s Ferington says that Home Performance with Energy Star creates a one-stop solution for homeowners to solve common house problems and provides a bigger return on their energy efficiency investment, especially when they take advantage of available financing. Many state agencies and utilities in Oregon are supporting Home Performance with Energy Star (including Energy Trust) by offering financial incentives to spur investment in home energy improvements. These incentives include low-interest financing or rebates on eligible measures, such as insulation, duct sealing, and equipment upgrades.

Spreading Like Wildfire

The high cost of energy and heating is an ongoing concern for consumers. Home Performance with Energy Star is sweeping the nation as the cost to operate our homes continues to escalate. Since it was launched in 2001, the program has expanded to many states, including California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Texas, and Wisconsin. Thanks to the program’s proven success and continued credibility among consumers and contractors, the future of Home Performance with Energy Star looks bright. CSG believes that this program will transform the entire home improvement market and expects it to be a model for residential energy-saving programs in the future. And if the growth pattern, from Massachusetts to Oregon, is any indication, Home Performance with Energy Star will become the standard bearer for residential energy efficiency improvements in the United States. 

—Linda Russo

Linda Russo is the marketing director of Conservation Services Group.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For information on specific Energy Star programs, visit www.energystar.gov.

To learn more about CSG, visit www.conservationsservicesgroup.com.