

# The Better Buildings Neighborhood View

How energy efficiency is improving lives, communities, and the economy

From the U.S. Department of Energy Better Buildings Neighborhood Program



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“Planning for success is harder than planning for failure. Take notes and learn, as this is a long run opportunity.”

—Karl Rábago, Vice President,  
Austin Energy

## Energy Tip

The average American household spends nearly \$2,000 per year on energy used in the home, but \$200 to \$400 of that could be wasted due to drafts, air leaks around openings, and outdated heating and cooling systems. Stop wasting energy—find out if there’s a Better Buildings Neighborhood Program in your area!

## Better Buildings Expands Connection to Communities

Events from this past year have proven that the current administration is very supportive of Better Buildings and our collective mission to bring the benefits of building energy upgrades to the masses. In February, President Obama formally adopted the Better Buildings name and announced other initiatives that align with this mission. The new Better Buildings Initiative is already well underway (see the recent announcement of the [Better Buildings Challenge](#)), so we realized that our program needed to emphasize the unique value we bring to communities across the country. We are therefore pleased to tell you that we have changed our program name to the **Better Buildings Neighborhood Program**.

This name was carefully selected to distinguish our existing program from other aspects of the Better Buildings Initiative. This name conveys a sense of scalable community or neighborhood-level efforts in a clear and positive way and encompasses our focus on energy efficiency in residential and/or commercial buildings. To keep up with these exciting changes, we have renamed this newsletter The Better Buildings Neighborhood View.

## Better Buildings Celebrates Its First Birthday!

On July 5, 2011, the Better Buildings Neighborhood Program celebrated its first birthday. After one year, we can see that much has been accomplished. DOE is extremely grateful to the partners for the passion, tireless hours, and partnership that have enabled our collective results to date. For example, between October 2010 and March 2011, program partners completed more than 5,500 building upgrades. We’re looking forward to a stellar year ahead where we improve the lives of tens of thousands of Americans on the road to our goal of more than 25,000 upgrades in 2011.

## Los Angeles County Makeover Contest Attracts More Than Just Winners

Six homeowners from Los Angeles County will receive free home energy makeovers from a contest organized by Energy Upgrade California in Los Angeles County, but the winners aren't the only residents poised to save energy. Energy Upgrade California is using the contest to generate news about its programs, helping to entice homeowners throughout Los Angeles County to achieve their own energy savings through upgrades.



Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky hopes the contest winners will inspire local homeowners to participate in the program. "Implementing Energy Upgrade California in Los Angeles County will help homeowners enhance their property values while cutting energy bills and energy consumption," Supervisor Yaroslavsky said. [Learn more about how Energy Upgrade California in Los Angeles County encourages homeowners to save energy through efficiency upgrades.](#)

## Massachusetts Captures Home Energy Waste

In Massachusetts, getting residents to pay attention to their energy use was as simple as a snapshot. The Department of Energy Resources (DOER) equipped a hybrid SUV with a thermal imaging system. Earlier this year, the vehicle traveled through seven communities and performed thermal scans of the approximately 40,000 homes it passed. To allay privacy concerns, DOER conducted legal research and public outreach, briefing town officials to let them know when the scans would be happening and exactly what would be scanned. DOER provided homeowners with an opt-out option, but the department found that many homeowners instead asked to make sure their homes did get scanned, prompting DOE to also create a priority list.



A thermal image of a house.  
Photo by Sagewell, Inc.

Infrared scanning produces thermal images that allow homeowners to see where opportunities exist in their homes for energy improvements. Homeowners are able to view their homes' thermal image analysis results on a secure website, and those who view their results are eligible for a no-cost energy efficiency assessment from DOER's Mass Save® program.

The thermal scans are quite revealing. While a relatively new home may appear to be well maintained, a thermal scan can expose problems such as missing insulation or air leaking from single-pane windows. Assessing visual scans can motivate homeowners to take the next step of getting their home professionally

assessed for energy efficiency opportunities. [Learn more about DOER's thermal scanning process and how it has helped Massachusetts homeowners save energy.](#)

## Financing Tool Fits the Bill

Some homeowners find additional energy improvement expenses easier to handle when they're incorporated into an existing bill. On-bill financing for energy efficiency upgrades provides homeowners the opportunity to pay for these improvements as part of their utility bills. For many homeowners, the energy savings can offset a significant portion of their energy efficiency loan payment.

In Oregon, [Clean Energy Works](#) offered on-bill financing as part of its comprehensive upgrade pilot program in the city of Portland. The successful pilot offer, which ended in March 2011, also included low-cost, long-term financing and assistance from an independent expert energy advisor. The program allowed for 500 low-cost loans for whole-home energy remodels and reduced the energy consumption in most of those homes by 20 percent or more. Based on the pilot's success, Clean Energy Works now offers on-bill financing to homeowners throughout Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah counties.

Other Better Buildings Neighborhood Programs, such as EnergySmart in Eagle County, Colorado, are working to incorporate on-bill financing into their financing options as well. Find out more about these programs by visiting the [Better Buildings Neighborhood Program website](#).

## Missouri Entices With Rebates, Lends for the Long-Term

When the Missouri Agricultural Energy Savings Team—A Revolutionary Opportunity (MAESTRO) first reached out to farmers to offer loans for efficiency upgrades, they were surprised to find the farmers often declined this offer. What MAESTRO soon realized was that they needed to find another way to generate initial interest.

MAESTRO decided to offer rebates for three levels of energy evaluations and recommended upgrades, in addition to loans. As the program adjusted to better reach its audience, agricultural participation went from one interested party to more than 30. Once the program has established a relationship with a farmer, MAESTRO then encourages the participants to look at deeper upgrades as an investment, offering them a 3% interest rate buy-down for up to \$50,000.

With the price of agricultural goods dropping and operational costs continuing to rise, MAESTRO is working to show farmers the long-term benefits of energy efficiency improvements. [Learn more about MAESTRO on the Better Buildings](#)

[Neighborhood Program website.](#)

## Stay Tuned...

Look for exciting news about the new Better Buildings Neighborhood Program website in the fall issue of The Better Buildings Neighborhood View!

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