

**'Save the Planet
...Be Eco-Smart'
--this is the slogan of the
non-profit Florida House
Institute for Sustainable
Development**

Editor's Note: This is the first in a four-part series on ways to save energy, spare the planet's resources and decrease pollution while saving money with new "Green" Home construction materials, appliances, and landscape.

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Staff Writer

PORT CHARLOTTE -- During the first half of the 20th century, many Florida homes had no need for electric water heaters.

No, Floridians did not heat their bath water in kettles on wood stoves. They had solar water heaters.

A half century after they were abandoned, solar water heaters are coming back--and much more has been developed to save energy and the earth's resources. These new products and technologies are called "Green," after nature's dominant color.

The early-day water heaters were homemade. The consisted of pipes running back and forth atop a black background and covered by a glass panel. The apparatus was set on the south side of the house with nothing obstructing the sun's rays.

Today, with the high cost of electricity and growing concerns of air pollution and ozone depletion, more and more modernized versions of the old-time Florida water heaters appear on roofs of houses.

The "collector" of a passive solar water heater looks like a dark glass panel of rectangular shape placed on the roof. As the water circulates in the 40-gallon collector, it is heated by the sun's rays. Another 40 gallons are held in the tank of the regular water heater--which serves as a backup in case of several cloudy days in a row. A "passive model has no moving parts that could break.

Earth-friendly buildings

The number one energy saver in a home is the solar water heater, according to Matt Ross, executive director of the Eco-Smart Homes & Buildings Program.

Water heating can comprise up to 30 per cent of your electric bill," Ross said. "In the early 1900s, there were solar water heaters. People built their homes with common sense, back then. Their homes had overhangs and porches.

"Starting in the 1950's, home construction was influenced by people who moved down here from the North. They wanted their homes to look like the ones they had left up North, and they wanted the same appliances to go in them."

This was swell as long as electricity was cheap and oil resources were thought to be limitless. Today, this is no longer the case.

The Eco-Smart Homes and Buildings Program was created by, and operates under license from the non-profit "Florida House Institute for Sustainable Development." A meeting with Ross was recently held at "The Florida House" to learn about the programs and products they recommend to build a "green house" or retrofit an older home.

The old-style "Florida House" was built five years ago on the campus of Sarasota County Technical Institute at the corner of Beneva and Proctor roads. So far, 60,000 people have visited the demonstration home, which came to be as the result of a partnership between the Florida House Institute for Sustainable Development and the County of Sarasota.

Members of the Sarasota County Cooperative Extension Service staff the home and conduct educational programs, along with related businesses.

Visiting hours are from 9 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

The educational sessions are held mostly from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays. There is no charge to the public, but registration must be made by calling 941-316-1200.

Sustainable living

The Florida House features saving energy or preserving resources are many -- from the cross ventilation and transom windows to construction blocks made from recycled material and bamboo parquet floor.

The goal of the The Eco-Smart Homes and Buildings Program is to educate the public-- as well as builders of residential or commercial structures -- in ways to preserve our ecosystems, save energy and reduce air pollution.

Ross said there is an added benefit to having a "green" house. It saves money on utility bills, every month, besides reducing air pollution.

Prospective home owners, or those wishing to retrofit their homes, as well as builders wishing to learn more about the program, can contact Ross with the toll-free number, 1-222-329-2805.

Ross said in many cases it is easier to obtain a mortgage for a home where energy savings features and appliances are included. The reason is that lenders know the monthly expenses of the borrower will be lower, due to the amount saved with lower utility bills.

(Next Week: "Green" Construction Materials)

What are the costs?

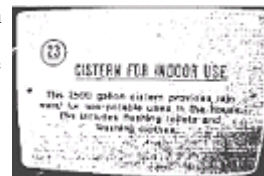
According to the Florida House Institute for Sustainable Development, a home or commercial building built with features found in the Eco-Smart Homes and Buildings Program cost less to own. It is most noticeable when a mortgage is involved, according to Executive Director Matt Ross.

The reason is that the money saved from each month with a lower electric bill is from the one third to one half greater than the extra mortgage payment reflecting the added construction cost.

The Institute brochure gives the following example:

Industry Standard Home	Eco-Smart Home
Mortgage Payment: \$865	Mortgage Payment: \$895
Utility Payments: \$150	Utility Payments: \$100

Total Expenses: \$1,015	Total Expenses: \$995



This sign explains how water bills can be drastically cut by collecting rain water for certain uses. And added benefit is that it reduces run off.

Learning Florida Living

The Florida House Learning Center offers educational programs on conservation and on how to live in harmony with the Florida environment. The courses are free, but preregistration is required by calling 941-316-1200, or in person at the Florida House, corner of Beneva and Proctor roads, Sarasota.

The courses are held from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays, unless otherwise noted.

- Feb. 9 - 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Shopping for your "Green" Florida Home
- Feb. 16 - Landscape Pruning
- Feb. 23 - 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Planning Your Own "Green" Home: New or Remodeling, Part One
- March 1 - 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Planning Your Own "Green" Home: New or Remodeling, Part Two
- March 8 - Water Conservation in the Home Landscape
- March 15 -- What's New in Green Building Materials
- March 22 - Water Gardens in the Landscape
- March 29 - Landscape and Turf Grass Fertilization

Keeping an eye on possible termite infestation is possible. Signs around the Florida House explain to visitors the many features used to make the demonstration home environmentally friendly by cutting down on the use of unneeded chemicals, or eliminating them all together.

