

Source: Bennington Banner, March 1, 2010

Energy efficiency workshop gives tips to mobile home owners

KEITH WHITCOMB JR.

Posted: 03/01/2010 11:36:11 PM EST

Monday March 1, 2010

POWNAL -- Mobile home owners were given a number of tips Thursday on how to make their mobile homes more energy efficient.

The workshop was led by Shaun Gilpin and Logan Zingus, of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity's non-profit entity, the Mobile Home Project, in conjunction with the Pownal Valley Affordable Housing committee.

Gilpin said that the Mobile Home Project is independent from the state and is not in the real-estate business, and that it works as an advocate for residents of mobile home parks.

"There is no one single bullet that will lower your energy bills," Zingus told roughly 20 people who gathered at the Pownal Rescue Squad building on Route 7. He outlined a number of areas, most having to do with insulation and energy regulation, which homeowners could improve on their own with inexpensive methods.

One area he said requires professional help is furnace maintenance. Zingus said that once every two years, homeowners should have their furnace filter cleaned and professionally maintained. He said that without getting in the maintenance person's way, a homeowner should be present when the maintenance occurs in order to make sure the work is thorough.

Other measures do not require professional aid, he said, such as turning down a thermostat by 5 degrees for eight hours a day. He said programmable thermostats are inexpensive and can be installed easily so the home isn't heated as much when the occupants are away.

Keeping the heat in and making the furnace work less are other areas homeowners can work at, he said. A furnace is built to keep the entire home heated, and so homeowners should keep all of their registers open. Closing them in one, unused room, does not save energy, Zingus said. Airflow between rooms is also important and the gaps under doors should be left open.

He said that 20 to 30 percent of a home's heat can be lost through its ducts, and that can be stopped by using acrylic mastic, a pliable material that can be applied by hand.

Most of Zingus' tips involved sealing up the home and keeping warm air from being replaced by cold. He said a resident should try to locate any drafts, usually around light sockets and electrical fixtures.

In terms of the wall insulation, there isn't much a mobile home owner can do, he said, aside from making sure any insulation that has fallen out is shoved back in and sealed.

Once a home is sealed from drafts, Zingus said that a carbon monoxide detector should be in use inside the home, especially in bedrooms. He said that in a sealed home, harmful gases won't have an outlet to escape and need to be monitored.

Moisture was another issue brought up. He said that if a mobile home is not on a concrete slab, it will absorb moisture from the ground. The problem can be fixed by covering the ground beneath a mobile home with thick plastic. He said that dryers shouldn't vent into crawl spaces, as moisture will damage the interior.

Zingus said that areas around pipes should be sealed with expanding foam and the pipes themselves should be covered with foam sleeves. The water heater should be insulated as well, as much of the heater's energy goes toward keeping water heated rather than heating it.

Heat loss through windows isn't necessarily stopped by new windows, he said. Many times, the energy saved is outweighed by the cost of the window. A better investment is to seal the edges around the window or to cover it with a thick blanket.

Compact fluorescent light bulbs are a good investment, Zingus said. The bulbs use half to a quarter the energy of a regular bulb and contain less mercury. He said the lights should still be turned off when not being used.

To further cut electric bills, people should keep their refrigerator maintained, as the appliances are the most costly devices to run in terms of electricity. He said that if the refrigerator has coils in the back, they should be kept free of dust. The seal on the door should be tight as well. He recommended shutting a dollar bill in the door and pulling it out; resistance meaning that the seal is good.

Zingus said that there are a number of different resources for mobile home owners. Aside from the Mobile Home Project, the Vermont Weatherization Program, Efficiency Vermont, and www.mobilehomerepair.com are effective resources.

All who attended the workshop were given free compact fluorescent light bulbs and low-flow shower heads.

Contact Keith Whitcomb at kwhitcomb@benningtonbanner.com.