

ENERGY CODE PLUS Q & A

Prepared by the Hinesburg Planning Commission and the Hinesburg Energy Committee.

What is Energy Code Plus (ECP)?

Energy Code Plus is a program run by Efficiency Vermont that helps homes meet and exceed Vermont's Residential Building Energy Standards (VT-RBES) which is required for all new home construction in the state. There is no cost to participate in the service.

How does ECP differ from RBES?

- Insulation installation (Grade II)
- Air leakage needs to go to 4 ACH50 (RBES is 5 ACH 50)
- Heating and cooling equipment needs to be Energy Star or equivalent
- Air ducts need to be in insulated space

In addition, all appliances, including heating and cooling systems, must be Energy Star or equivalent.

Who will be affected by the ECP standard?

ECP will be required for residential new construction, including single, duplex, multifamily residences, and modular homes. ECP is not required for additions or accessory apartments to buildings that are pre-ECP.

How much more does it cost to build to ECP?

According to Chris Gordon from Efficiency Vermont, modeling was done a few years ago when the third tier (ECP) was first created. In a 2,000sf house, the incremental costs would be \$2507 above the state standard (RBES) and the annual savings would be \$460. With the current incentives of up to \$1200, the additional cost to the builder would be \$1307. This amount would be earned back in less than three years.

What are the benefits?

- Third party verification: ECP comes with third party verification: through the ECP program, Efficiency Vermont conducts all inspections, submits the RBES certificate, and performs and issues a Home Energy Rating (HERS). Planning and Zoning staff need only refer the applicant to Efficiency Vermont.
- Consultation: Efficiency Vermont provides an energy consultant who works with the builder throughout the process at no cost.
- Lower cost of ownership: Owners of energy efficient homes will pay a lot less in maintenance costs and monthly energy bills; their homes will also be warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer.
- Financial incentives: There are a number of rebates available which will vary over time; currently up to \$1200 is available for an average-sized home.

What are the disadvantages?

Builders will be told to enroll in ECP when they apply for a building permit. If someone begins construction before contacting Efficiency Vermont, it could be costly and time intensive to remedy. The Energy Committee will also ensure that everyone who applies for a building permit receives a follow-up call emphasizing the need to enroll in the ECP program before beginning construction.

Are there any exceptions to the ECP standard?

Mobile homes are exempt, as well as those dwelling types that meet the Vermont Residential Building Energy Standard (RBES) exemptions (e.g., mobile homes, owner/builder special provision, etc.) The waiver option may also be considered in exceptional cases when the Energy Code Plus standard cannot reasonably be achieved. New dwellings permitted prior the enactment of this provision (xxxxx, 2014) will not be required to meet the standard.

Why would builders use the ECP standard?

Higher energy standards result in homes that are more comfortable, less expensive to maintain, and increase a home's overall value. Sterling Construction, the builder of the Thistle Hill development, builds all of its homes to the Energy Star standard. Snyder Homes will build Green Street Village Apartments to the ECP standard because energy efficient buildings are more affordable to maintain. In addition, a low HERS (Energy Rating System) score has become a selling point for homes on the real estate market, since homebuyers are looking for energy-efficient homes.

What do builders have to do?

Builders should contact Efficiency Vermont to enroll prior to the start of the project. An energy consultant from EV will work with the builder during the planning and construction process (at no cost to the builder) to ensure that the building project successfully completes the ECP program. The consultant will also perform and issue a Home Energy Rating (HERS) for the home.