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DON'T SEE RED WHEN THE UTILITY BILL COMES **Have your builder use Energy Star guidelines on your new home**

It was a perfect day for a tour: hot, muggy, no breeze to speak of. A perfect day for Bill Yell to tout the benefits of an energy-efficient home.

Yell, spokesman for Huntsville Utilities, joined Hunter Homes to lead a tour of a new home built under Energy Star certification guidelines. The house was at Bainbridge off U.S. 231 North, a Hunter Homes development.

Energy Star is an Environmental Protection Agency program aimed at encouraging builders around the nation to build homes using energy-efficient materials and techniques. Yell said building a home under Energy Star guidelines can save a family \$420 per year on its utility costs, or \$35 per month.

He noted that Huntsville Utilities recently reached a summer record for energy demand.

"In the heat and humidity, we really enjoy having energy-efficient homes," he said.

Huntsville Utilities has certified 130 new homes under the Energy Star program, more than any utility in the state, officials said. To achieve certification, builders and their subcontractors use energy-efficient windows, appliances, insulation and other features to make a home more efficient and air-tight, then undergo efficiency tests conducted by the utility.

Certified homes are, on average, 35 percent more energy-efficient than a typical home, said Karen Clifton of the energy division of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. She said Energy Star homes also have a smaller impact on the environment than traditionally built homes by using less energy.

"A home puts out two times more pollution than cars," Clifton said.

Huntsville Utilities is working to encourage more builders to get their new homes Energy Star certified, Yell said.

"The builder has also got to train his subcontractors so they change the way they do things ... from framing to sheet rock, to make homes more airtight," said John Shell, director of the Energy Right program for the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Tom Pendleton of Hunter Homes said the company is proud to be part of a growing nationwide effort, and the only production builder in Alabama currently using Energy Star standards for all of its homes. He said the extra work involved in building an Energy Star home adds about \$15 to a monthly mortgage payment on a Hunter Homes model, but results in a net savings of about \$20 per month because of the energy saved.

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