

Hickory Consortium unfurls Energy Star® banner in ME and NH

In March and April of 2004, the Hickory Consortium convened two sizeable groups of funders, developers, contractors and architects of affordable housing in Maine and New Hampshire for both states' first workshops integrating Energy Star® with green building processes for affordable housing. Entitled ***Integrated Development for Energy Star Housing: Improving the Process for Lower Cost, Higher Efficiency and Higher Quality***, the seminar highlighted the best of recent and field-tested research and development nationwide, much of it originated by the Hickory Consortium as part of the US Department of Energy's Building America Program. The Hickory Consortium was contracted to deliver these workshops through ICF Consulting by the Community Planning and Development branch of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The gatherings were sponsored by the Maine State Housing Authority, and by the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund in conjunction with a special forum on development costs.

The seminars concentrated on building process management and on how residential builders and developers can improve energy efficiency by at least 50% while substantially increasing quality, productivity and even profit. New building and retrofits were both addressed. A portion of the seminar called "What Every Developer Should Know" pointed to the critical relationship between construction quality and energy efficiency, particularly in the Northeast, and on how to eliminate waste not just of materials, but throughout the entire building process. From topics such as partnering for excellence in the construction process to what actually causes poor performance in buildings, the seminar integrated practical and technical examples with sound business practices to provide a template for a higher standard of building. A portion of this covered financing green affordable housing.

The opportunities and incentives of the Energy Star® program provided a strong baseline for a primer on energy-efficient construction. Presenters provided specific instructions on HVAC sizing, building envelope choices, and mold reduction, as well as initial contract discussions, field supervision, and reduction of operating costs. Additionally, time was taken to explain how the environmental ethic improves health and well-being for a home's residents, lowering costs usually absorbed by society at large in the form of higher health care costs, environmental remediation, pollution abatement, and high oil and gas prices.

Of course, energy efficiency alone does not work the magic of lowering construction costs. Going beyond traditional project management, presenters explained the now largely accepted but not yet widely used techniques of managing the building process tightly. The workshops closed with exercises in multi-stakeholder goals clarification, communication feedback loops, the guidance of jobsite culture and "doing it right the first time", all of which emerge from the discipline of systems thinking.

Participants were enthusiastic about the workshops and have asked for further sessions.

The Hickory Consortium has applied these principles and practices to many housing construction projects, some of them considered national and even international models for green residential building.

For more information please contact the Hickory Consortium, 1 Keefe Road, Acton, MA 01720
978-287-4578 info@hickoryconsortium.org www.hickoryconsortium.org